

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE



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DIE LIKE A THIEF

A NEW MIKE SHAYNE

Short Novel by

BRETT HALLIDAY

NIGHTMARE AT CRESTVIEW TOWERS

NEW Exciting Novelet by

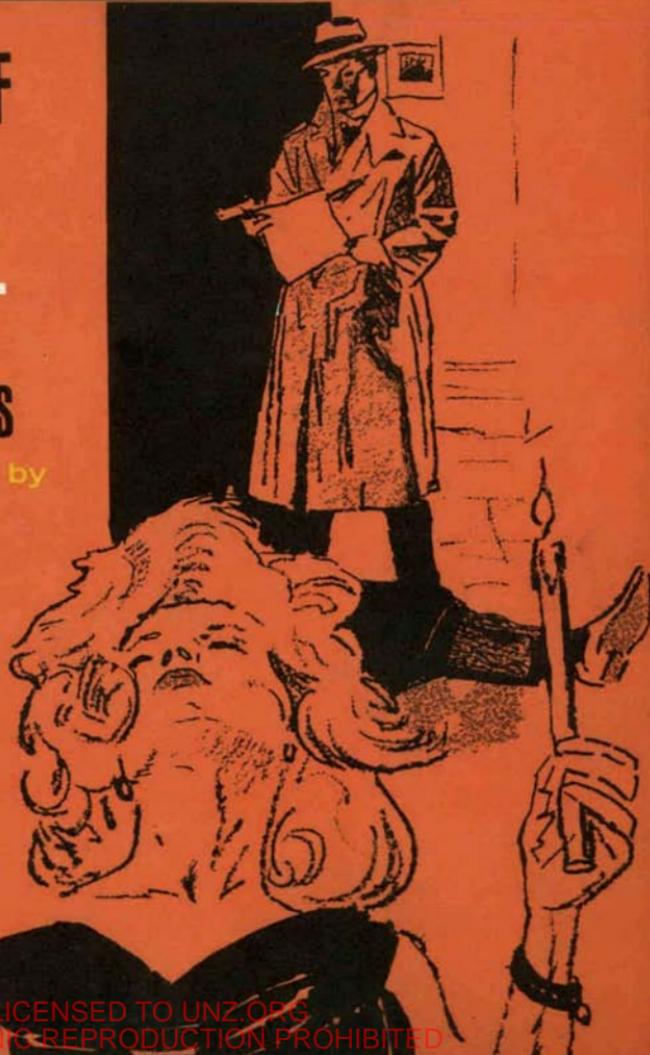
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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE



JANUARY, 1969

VOL. 24, NO. 2

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL DIE LIKE A THIEF

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Who had stolen that case of priceless jewels? There wasn't much to go on, Mike Shayne decided. But one thing he did know. The thief had killed to get them, and was ready to kill again. A bullet in the redhead's shoulder told him that.

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A NEW COMPLETE MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL



DIE LIKE A THIEF

Somewhere in the Miami night a king's ransom lay hidden, with death the price of its freedom. And somewhere out there Mike Shayne, wounded, alone, sought the trail of the gun-mad killer who had baited his jewel-strewn path with—Murder!

by BRETT HALLIDAY



MICHAEL SHAYNE was wrestling with a masked man with four arms and six eyes when he awakened to sweat pouring off him—and the telephone ringing.

Swearing, he looked at his clock. It was six in the morning. He reached for a cigarette and lit it while he continued to swear and to shake the memory of the

nightmare from his foggy mind. He took his time. Anyone who would call him at six would keep on ringing for a long time.

When his cigarette was drawing, and his head had cleared, the redhead reached for the receiver.

“Shayne,” he snapped.

“Mike? Sorry, but this is urgent.”

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The voice spoke without identifying itself, but Shayne knew who it was at once: Ed Landers, investigator for Inter-Continental Insurance Company.

"It always is, Ed," Shayne said wearily, but he came fully alert—Landers did not call at such an hour unless it was important. Shayne was on permanent retainer in Miami for Inter-Continental.

"Are you awake, Mike?" Landers asked grimly.

"Shoot," Shayne said.

"We've just had a burglary," Landers said. "About midnight, out in North Miami. Moncrief—that's our client, Gordon Moncrief—got around to reporting to us about an hour ago. The way he tells it the cops are all over the place, but we want you out there pronto."

"Okay, Ed. Just what was taken?"

"Moncrief wasn't exactly clear, but part of it was a ruby necklace we've got protected for a cool two hundred thousand dollars."

Shayne whistled through his teeth. "That must be some ruby necklace."

"It is, and damned hard to fence, believe me," Landers said. "It's something picked up in India by Moncrief's old sea pirate grandfather. I think it's got a history and all that. My staff is checking it out now. But it sounded like more was taken, and we've got Moncrief's jewels covered for

a total of seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars!"

"That's a lot of rocks, Ed. Is this Moncrief in the jewel business?"

"No, he's president of an importing company, also founded by the grandfather. The rocks are mainly stuff picked up by the grandfather and passed on in the family. They show them a few times a year, and this time Moncrief didn't tell us in advance so we could cover them! I don't like it."

"What's his excuse for not telling you?"

"That it wasn't a real showing, just a kind of appraisal and gathering of friends. Gordon Moncrief's father, Roy Moncrief, just died about two months ago, and Gordon took over everything."

"Now it's been stolen, and you don't like the coincidence of the thieves hitting just at the right time?"

"It's got a smell to it, Mike."

"Yeah, it does," Shayne agreed. "All right. Give me the address and I'll go right out."

Landers gave the address, and Shayne hung up to shower, shave and get ready for his assignment.

II

THE MONCRIEF HOUSE was a big old mansion complete with towers and an incongruous widow's walk—the sea was at least

fifteen miles distant and out of sight. Mike Shayne guessed that the widow's walk was the work of the Moncrief grandfather, the old sea pirate Landers had mentioned.

Shayne drove around the winding driveway and had time to see two police cruisers before a spotlight shined directly into his eyes and a voice called sharply: "Halt!"

Shayne stopped his car.

"Get out slow," the sharp voice said.

Shayne stepped out. Two uniformed policemen walked warily toward him. When they were a few feet away, one of them smiled and holstered his gun.

"Shayne! How the hell are you?"

"Fine, Johnson," Shayne said, recognizing the patrolman.

The other patrolman said, "You know this guy, Johnson?"

"Sure. Mike Shayne, a private. What you doing here, Mike?"

The other cop said, "You've got credentials, Mr. Shayne?"

Shayne showed his license, and his Inter-Continental card. The second policeman studied them. Johnson looked at the card.

"These people insured by your outfit?"

"That's it," Shayne said. "Who's on the job?"

"Lieutenant McGuire from Burglary, but the Chief's inside, too," Johnson said.



Shayne got his credentials back and walked up to the house. He was admitted at the door on a signal from patrolman Johnson behind him, and went into a large library where he saw Lieutenant McGuire working with the finger-print man. Chief Will Gentry was studying an open french window with a disgusted expression.

"Hello, Will," Shayne said to his old friend.

Gentry grunted. "Insurance?"

Mike Shayne nodded, grinning.

"A hell of a haul," Gentry growled. "They just walked in and took it like peanuts."

The Chief shook his head, and seemed to glare across the room to where a group of people sat

in varying degrees of sleepiness and annoyance. Shayne counted two men and two women.

"Which one's Moncrief?" Shayne asked.

"The tall one that looks mad," Gentry said.

Gordon Moncrief was very tall, at least six feet four, and heavy. He looked like a professional tackle rather than a rich business man. The other man in the group was short and slim, and the two women were both slim, blonde, good-looking; all that differentiated them was that one was fifteen years older than the other.

"What's the picture, Will?"

"Three men, masked, came in through the french doors. The doors were open, although Moncrief doesn't know why. They're usually closed and locked. The four over there say none of them opened the doors, and the six servants say likewise."

"Who are the three besides Moncrief?" Shayne asked, looking toward the group.

"John Porter, Moncrief's lawyer and an old friend. The older blonde is Angela Peters, Moncrief's cousin who lives here with him. The younger one is Cynthia Rose, Moncrief's sweetie. How serious a sweetie no one is saying."

"That's the whole cast?"

"No, there were three others: Edgar Eyck, a jewel appraiser friend of Moncrief's; Franklin

Berg, a millionaire playboy who likes jewels; and Ben Monks, the older Moncrief's secretary who lives here, too."

"What happened to them?"

"Eyck and Berg left before the show began. I've got men out talking to them now. The latest report I got is that both look clean —they went home to bed and can prove it."

"They could have set it up to look good."

"They could, but I can't see either of them involved in a heist, even of this size."

"And the secretary? Ben Monks?"

Gentry chewed his cigar. "Missing. At least, they all say he was here, they don't know when he wasn't here, and they don't know why he isn't here."

"Sounds interesting. It has all the signs of inside work."

"You don't know the half of it," Gentry growled. "After the jokers came in through the conveniently open french doors, they covered all exits from the room like they'd built it, and scooped up the rocks without even looking at them."

"To top it off, Moncrief swears that the whole idea of having them appraised, now that they're officially his after the probating of the will of his father, was a spur-of-the-moment deal. He thought it up himself only two days ago, and discussed it with no one outside the house."

"So we'd spot it as inside pretty fast," Shayne said, "and that might give the insider a reason to want to vanish with his boys."

"It crossed my mind," Gentry said sourly.

"Monks was old Moncrief's secretary? You mean the grandfather?"

"No, the father: Mr. S. Roy Moncrief. He died two months ago. He was something of a playboy, international yacht type. He'd turned over the running of the business to his son five or six years ago, but he kept a lot of irons in the fire and hired Monks to be his secretary and live here."

"And Monks stayed on after the father, Roy Moncrief, died?"

"That's it. Moncrief has hinted that Monks might be leaving soon, by request."

Shayne tugged on his ear. "Motive and opportunity, and he's missing. It looks good, Will."

"Maybe," Gentry said. "We'll know more after we've gone over the place. If he's slipped we'll have a hard time tracing him. We'll do better with the thieves, if they're the pros they seem to be."

"Anything else you want to tell me?"

Gentry chewed his cigar, and nodded. "Yeah. The boys made a smooth exit, and fast, but Moncrief spotted something about one of them. This was a big guy, as big as Moncrief, with a scar on

his left hand that looked like a 'bunch of grapes' according to Moncrief. And the left arm of the guy was stiff and bent, as if he couldn't straighten it."

"Mean anything?"

"Not yet, but it should when we check the files for the M.O. and the type of caper. On top of that, Moncrief got two shots off after them, and he thinks he hit one."

"He had a gun? Moncrief?"

"A Walther P-38, 9mm, from the war. He keeps it in the desk over there, loaded and oiled. He's got a permit. He says he's a crack shot, and while he didn't see the man he thinks he hit, he saw a shadow he fired at."

"Any blood out there?"

"I've got some men checking."

Shayne nodded. "Okay. Can I talk to the people?"

"You've got a right, working for the insurance people."

Shayne walked toward where the four civilians, all in evening dress, were looking madder and madder.

III

MIKE SHAYNE said, "Mr. Moncrief?"

The big man glared up from a sofa. "Who the hell are you?"

"Mike Shayne. From the insurance company."

Moncrief melted into smiles. "Oh, of course. Well, this is fast

work. I was slow in calling New York, and don't even have a list yet, especially with Monks not around, but I'll get at the list soon. Then we can talk claim, and—"

Shayne interrupted. "I'm not a claims man, Mr. Moncrief. I'm an investigator. Ed Landers of Inter-Continental sent me over to see what I can do to recover the jewels."

"Oh," Moncrief said, and, "Damn. How many cops do we need?"

The short, slim lawyer, John Porter, said dryly, "As many as we can get, Gordon. Those jewels are worth ten times the insurance, and you know it. I'm damned if I know why you took such a risk."

"How did I know anyone would rob a small gathering like this?" Moncrief snarled. "How did they know?"

"Yes," Porter said scathingly, "how?"

The older blond, cousin Angela Peters said, "Don't you look at me, John Porter! You knew about the jewels being out of the vault just as well as the rest of us."

"Damn it, everyone here knew," Moncrief said.

The young woman, the beauty, Cynthia Rose, said, "What are we all snapping about? Gordon is insured, and the police will get them back anyway. I'm tired. Can't we go to bed?"

Shayne said, "I'm sure Chief Gentry will let you all go to bed soon. Right now you'd help me by telling me anything you noticed."

John Porter shook his head. "It all happened so fast. They came in and lined us up and scooped up the jewels and vanished."

"Where were the jewels?"

"On the big table over there —near the french doors, damn it," Moncrief said. "They had us cold, but when they went out I grabbed my old P-38 and had a shot at them anyway."

"And that was stupid," Cynthia Rose said to her lover. "Did you have to take such a risk, Gordon?"

"I don't like to be pushed around," Moncrief growled.

"Gordon sometimes thinks he's his grandfather," Angela Peters said acidly. "You should be sailing off to the pirate islands, Gordon, not running a company."

"Oh, shut up, Angela!" Moncrief said.

Shayne watched them with a weary interest. They were par for the course—rich, spoiled and arrogant. Or maybe they were really a little shaken and very tired. It was dawn outside, and they had been up all night.

Cynthia Rose said, "I really don't see what we're all so concerned about. The police will catch them. I can't imagine why anyone would steal them anyway."



"Why not, Miss Rose?" Shayne asked.

"They're all museum pieces, Mr. Shayne. In fact, they aren't much loss anyway. They were all going to a museum."

"Museum?"

Gordon Moncrief said, "My father's will left them all to various museums. I was having them appraised for tax reasons. They'll give me a whopping big charity-contribution write-off."

"In other words, your father left them to non-profit museums, not to you?" Shayne said.

"No, he left them to me, but he stipulated that they couldn't be sold, and that he would like them to go to various museums

as Moncrief exhibits. It seemed like a fine tax idea."

"Then why were you having them appraised here? I mean, why a private appraisal?"

"Well," Moncrief said lamely, "I wanted the value, but I also wanted to show them off again. I mean, I just wanted to sort of look at them."

Cynthia Rose said, "What Gordon is saying, Mr. Shayne, is that he loves those stones, mostly because his grandfather got them from all over the world, and he hated to part with them. I think he also wanted to give each of us one."

"Could you do that?" Shayne asked Moncrief.

"No," Moncrief said defiantly, "but I was going to and the will and museum be damned! If we get them back, I'm going to!"

Moncrief sighed suddenly. "I guess it was a dumb trick, but how did I know they would be stolen? I mean, there were only friends here, nothing public."

"Yeah," Shayne said, "only friends."

Before the redhead could say anything more, Will Gentry called to him. Shayne turned. The Chief of Miami Police was at the french doors. Shayne crossed to him.

"Come outside," Gentry said grimly.

Shayne stepped out into the night.

IV

TWO OF Gentry's men stood with the Chief in the red dawn. Mike Shayne joined them, and they began to walk away from the house without another word.

Shayne strode after them. They hurried in the warming morning toward a distant cottage on the grounds half-hidden in a grove of trees. Two more of Gentry's men, including Lieutenant McGuire, stood to the right of the cottage, deep inside the trees.

Gentry walked up to McGuire. "Over here," McGuire said.

Shayne followed the Chief to where McGuire pointed down into the bushes. He saw a pair of black shoes, dark socks, and twisted trousers.

"We spotted him just a few minutes ago," McGuire said.

"Let's see him," Gentry snapped.

McGuire pushed back the thick bushes, with help from the patrolmen, and Gentry and Shayne stepped closer to the dead man. He had been a big man, almost as big as Moncrief himself . . . Only this man was some years younger—or had been.

He was very dead, a single bullet hole in his chest that had not bled a lot but had killed him just as effectively.

Chief Gentry bent down to examine the wound.

Shayne studied the face of the

dead man. He had a good hunch he was looking at the missing secretary, Ben Monks.

"Could be a 9mm," Gentry said. "Moncrief got him dead center with a wild shot. It'd pretty well figure that Monks would know we'd guess inside job and beat it with his hired hands."

Shayne nodded. "Could be, Will. Or maybe the hired hands decided Monks had no more use to them."

Gentry stood up. "Maybe he didn't have anything to do with the heist. Could be he just got in the way."

"It could be anything until you find the gang," Shayne said. "Anything on him?"

McGuire gingerly searched the dead man, not wanting to move him before the arrival of the medical examiner. He came up with a wallet, that identified the man as Monks all right; forty dollars in cash; a host of credit cards; a large set of keys; a package of cigarettes; a cigarette lighter; and a small notebook.

Gentry studied the notebook. "Look at this, Mike."

Shayne looked at a page with a date—today—and a time of midnight written down on it.

"Looks pretty definite," Shayne said.

"Well find out for sure," Gentry growled. "I'll go up and wind the boys up at the house, then start checking the M.O.s and that

description of one of the men. What about you?"

"I think I'll nose around here some more," Shayne said.

"Okay. Let me know if you find anything we didn't."

Shayne agreed, and waited until Gentry and his men had gone back to the house. The sun was just up now, and the redhead narrowed his eyes as he looked around.

From where he stood the french doors were clearly visible.

It was possible that a man firing from the doors at fleeing bandits could have hit a man standing near the cottage.

But it was more likely that the three thieves, their need of Monks over, had killed the secretary to get rid of him. And if they had, then they had passed this way also.

Shayne went over the ground carefully, making a circle around the spot where he had seen the body of Monks, and slowly expanding that circle. He reached a narrow dirt road that ran at the edge of Moncrief's property and saw the tire tracks Gentry's men had already made a cast of for identification.

It was clear that the thieves had parked here and driven away along the dirt road to the highway. The spot was hidden, and could not have been found in the dark—which had all the sound of inside information again.

Shayne went on in his circles, the sun hot now, and near the road, some twenty yards from the tire marks, he found what he was looking for. Or was it? He bent and picked up the small object.

It was a round brass disc with a hole at the top—small and half pressed into the dirt, and Shayne saw it only because the now full sun had glinted on it at an angle as he passed. He held it and frowned.

The disc was flat and worn and had a number on one side: 221. On the other side it had three letters: *A.B.C.*

Shayne studied it. It could be important, or nothing at all. It could have been on the ground for months, or it could have been dropped yesterday. Shayne decided to keep it quiet for the moment.

The redhead had two reasons for this. In the first place it could be unimportant and a waste of time for the police, or, if important, shown to anyone involved could give the thieves a warning. Which brought Shayne to the second reason for keeping the disc to himself.

In a matter of an insurance robbery, the interests of the insurance company and the police were not always the same. The police wanted to catch the thieves. The insurance company wanted to recover the loot. Both, of course, would like to do both things, but

it was a matter of order, of which was most important.

Very often the insurance company was willing to deal with the thieves, pay a percentage to get the loot back and no questions asked. Only after that was the company interested in catching the thieves. The police would not make such a deal, and did not like such deals.

The jewels were Shayne's prime concern in this case, and he would do his job best by operating alone, at least for now.

So he pocketed the brass disc and continued his search. He worked for another two hours, slowly and methodically, and in that time the police left. They placed guards on the house and grounds, who leaned against trees and watched Shayne work. Twice, the people from the house came out and looked at Shayne working.

Then all became quiet as the day wore on and the people of the house finally got the chance to sleep. Shayne finally gave up without finding anything else. He nodded to the three cops left on the grounds by Chief Gentry, and walked to his car.

Inside the car he lit a cigarette and studied the brass disc again. He had a pretty good hunch what it was, and what he had to do to use it.

He drove out of the grounds and turned toward Miami proper.

V

LUCY HAMILTON looked up reprovingly as Mike Shayne strode into his Flagler Street office.

"You, Michael Shayne, are late!" the pert secretary said.

"You, Angel, are all wrong," Shayne grinned at his brown-eyed girl Friday. "I've been on the job since six this morning, and don't you forget it."

"What job, Michael?"

Shayne explained the job, and Lucy listened with a frown.

"You think that this Ben Monks was the inside man, and the gang killed him?" Lucy asked.

"Maybe. Or maybe Moncrief hit him by chance. Anyway, our job is to get those jewels if we can and save good old Inter-Continental a lot of money. Landers hasn't called here?"

"Not yet."

"Okay. Bring me in a telephone book and a city directory," Shayne instructed, and went on into his private office.

While he waited for the telephone book and the directory, Shayne went over his file on known fences. He narrowed it down to three who were big enough to handle a bag of loot as big as the Moncrief job. None of the three were the type to deal in recognizable historical gems, but there was always a first time for everyone.

He jotted down the names, not

that he would make them a primary path—Gentry and his men would go over that ground more thoroughly than Shayne could.

When Lucy brought in the two books he wanted, Shayne went to work on the brass disc. He checked the Miami metropolitan telephone book for pool rooms, where the disc could mark a private locker; beach clubs, where the disc would be for a cabana; and health clubs, where the disc could indicate a personal locker or clothes basket.

There was, in the end, only one good possibility: Al Bent's Health Club. *A.B.C.*—Al Bent's Club. Shayne turned to the city directory and located Al Bent's Club in a shabby downtown area of cheap clubs, bars, clip joints, hotels, and shady businesses. It looked like the kind of neighborhood thieves would frequent.

Shayne jotted down the address, grabbed his panama from the hat rack, and left his inner office. He stopped to instruct Lucy on what to do when Ed Landers called from New York.

"Ask him to give you the authorization to negotiate with the crooks if I find them. How high he's willing to go to get the stones back, and how quiet he wants me to keep it."

"I will, Michael."

Shayne went out and down to his car. He drove the ten-odd blocks to the address of Al Bent's



Health Club. The club was in a six-story yellow brick building in a block of taverns, nightclubs and rooming houses.

The nightclubs were all closed, their doors standing open in the morning with that desolate aura all nightclubs have during the day when the cleaning people are at work and the daylight reveals their shabby tinsel to the world. Nightclubs are an illusion; they need darkness to glitter as places of joy and excitement.

The bars were all open and doing a thriving business as the noon hour approached. The steps of the rooming houses and the lobbies of the hotels, were doing a brisk traffic. It was the time of day in this neighborhood when the denizens were just up for breakfast, and busy with their hundred-and-one plans for conning the world out of enough money to make the coming night a happy time.

Al Bent's club itself was on

the third and fourth floors of its yellowing building. There was an ancient and rickety elevator Shayne rode upward in silence and in the company of three beefy characters who seemed to flex their muscles beneath the cheap suits that fitted them as though they were wet and clinging.

The office of the club was on the third floor. An odor of heat, steam and sweat greeted Shayne like the thick air of some jungle. He waited at a deserted counter, with rows of wire baskets behind it, while all along the corridor naked men paraded their sweaty skins and shining muscles.

A distant thumping and grunting told Shayne that the gym was already busy, and muttered conversation to his right indicated where the locker room was.

"You want to sign up, chum?"

The man who emerged from some inner recess was a typical health club attendant—small, skinny, rat-faced and weasel-eyed. The kind of man who made a living catering to brainless hulks with beautiful muscles, and who could think and con rings around his grunting behemoths.

"Not today," Shayne said. "I want some information."

"Information we don't sell. Beat it."

Shayne leaned across the counter. "This you sell to me, or give away to the cops."

The skinny attendant recoiled

as if slapped in the face with a wet flounder. The word 'cops' was a very dirty word around Al Bent's Health Club.

"What's with cops, buster?" the rat-face snarled.

Shayne showed his credentials, the ones that said he was the Inter-Continental man in Miami. "Jewel heist. I'm looking to get the stuff back, no questions asked. You tell me what I want to know, and the cops don't hear. You don't tell me, I tell the cops what I know, and they come down here and lean on you and everyone else."

The attendant studied the credentials, licking his lips the whole time. His eyes were narrowed and busy. He looked up at Shayne and waited. Shayne laid a ten on the counter. The weasel eyes glanced around and saw everything that moved or didn't. He scooped up the ten.

"What do you want?"

Shayne produced the brass disc. "Who does this belong to."

The attendant looked at the disc, both sides. "I don't know. Maybe it ain't even a regular."

"Look it up."

The attendant dug under the counter and came up with a card-file box. His quick fingers rifled through the cards like a bank teller counting money. Shayne didn't think he would like to get into a card game with the skinny man.

"What's that number again?"

"Two-twenty-one," Shayne read.

The skinny attendant blinked at a card he was looking at, rubbed his chin, moved his mouth, and seemed to be having great trouble in making himself speak.

"You got it?" Shayne snapped.

"Yeah," the attendant said slowly. "Only—"

"Only what?"

"It don't make no sense. You said this was a jewel heist?"

"I didn't say the tag belonged to one of the heisters," Shayne said. "Who is it?"

"It's Hank Agar's locker. He owns the Five Spot Club a couple doors away from here," the attendant said. "Only he ain't no heister."

"You're sure?"

"Mister, I'm sure as all hell."

"Why?"

"Hank's blind."

VI

THE FIVE SPOT was three steps down from the street, and the outer door was propped open. A shaft of sunlight knifed into the gloom of the cellar club through the open door, and the interior seemed to cringe in the unaccustomed light.

Mike Shayne followed the path of light into the low ceilinged room. The bar was small and to

the left. The main room was straight ahead, chairs piled on tables and two sullen men mopping and polishing the floor. An electrician was working on the mike up on the bare stage.

Behind the bar the bartender worked, polishing the woodwork. He eyed Shayne.

"Closed, bud."

"Where's Agar?"

"Mr. Agar's busy. Who are you, and what do you want?"

"I'll tell Agar," Shayne said. "You tell him Mike Shayne wants to see him, and he wants to talk to me."

"Listen, bud, I—"

"Tell him," Shayne snapped. "He's got trouble he doesn't want."

The bartender watched the redhead for a long moment. Then he turned and walked off in the gloom of the club toward a door in the rear near the stage. Shayne sat on a bar stool and thought about a blind thief. A blind man could organize thieves, for that matter. If—

"You!"

The bartender stood at the doorway and motioned to Shayne. The redhead walked to the door.

"Inside. Mr. Agar'll talk to you."

Shayne went through the door and the bartender went back to his woodwork. Shayne found himself in a corridor that went back behind the stage. There were a

lot of doors. One was open. Shayne walked to the open door.

A tall, slender man sat behind a cluttered desk. The man's eyes were covered by thick dark glasses, and his head was held at an alert angle like a listening bird.

"Mr. Shayne?" the man said.

"Yeah. You're Agar?"

"Hank Agar, right. Sit down and tell me about the trouble I've got."

Shayne sat down. Agar seemed to be listening intently. Now the tall blind man smiled.

"You're a big man, Shayne. You move light, though. Big and hard, right? And you'll be the real Mike Shayne, right? The private detective?"

"That's right, Agar. Right now I'm doing a little work for an insurance company."

"And it effects me?"

"Maybe, and maybe not. Where were you last night?"

Agar slowly shook his head. "You're in my club, Shayne, and you're not a cop. If you were a cop you'd have to charge me with something before I'd have to talk, right? So maybe you better just tell me your story first, and then I'll tell you where I was."

Shayne studied the blind man. Agar was a cool customer. He sat quietly, his sightless eyes aimed at Shayne from behind the dark glasses, and his head still held at that odd angle. It was a characteristic of the blind—being unable to

see, they had no gauge to their own physical postures and tended to hold themselves awkwardly.

"All right," Shayne said. "There was a robbery last night. A man was killed. I found a locker tag for Al Bent's Health Club near the body. I checked at Bent's, and the locker is your's."

"A tag for locker two-twenty-one?"

"That's it. Now, I want those stones back. I'll pay a fair fee, and no questions."

"Where did you find the tag?" the blind man asked.

"If you dropped it, you know. If you didn't, you should have a story about how it might have gotten where you didn't drop it."

Agar sat silent, motionless. The blind nightclub owner was thinking, the dark glasses looking straight at Shayne until the redhead began to wonder if Agar could see him after all. Finally, Agar nodded.

"All right, that's fair. I didn't have anything to do with a robbery, and I don't care about anyone who did. I've been out of town for a week. I only got back this morning. I can prove it. That locker up at Al Bent's is in my name, but I let anyone in the club use it."

"Who used it last?"

Agar smiled. "That would be your man, wouldn't it? Someone who forgot to hang the tag on the board up at Bent's. Hold on."

Agar reached for his intercom with a smoothness that belied his lack of sight. He spoke low but sharply into the speaker, and then sat back like a tall cat, immobile, at rest in his dark world. He did not seem nervous or have any need to make talk.

The silence stretched on, and Shayne studied Agar's office. He saw nothing suspicious, and nothing unusual. He had a pretty good hunch that Agar had a pistol in the desk drawer second from the top to his right and open, and a better hunch that Agar could get it fast if he needed it.

The door opened and the bartender came in. He looked at Shayne sullenly and waited for Agar to speak.

"Who used my locker up at Bent's while I was gone, Forbes?"

"I used it once, boss," Forbes said.

"When did you use it?"

"Couple days ago."

"Not yesterday?"

"No. What's up, boss?"

"Never mind," Agar said. "Who else used the locker? Make it after you did."

"Well," Forbes said, scratching his head and glaring at Shayne for causing all this trouble. "A couple of the waiters used it, and—"

"Forget the staff," Agar snapped, and the blind man seemed to sense something. "You're covering, Forbes. What don't you want me to know?"



Come on, damn it. This could be trouble."

Forbes sweated. "Listen, boss, I seen the guy in here a lot, and he had this here friend liked to work out every day to keep in shape, and—"

"Tell it!" Agar snapped.

Forbes glared his hate at Shayne, wiped his face. "He's a kind of stocky guy. The only name I know is Freddy. Like I said, he comes in regular. I figure he lives around here. So yesterday he comes in with this big guy, and after we get talkin' a while Freddy says the big guy sure needs a place to work out."

"So you offered him my locker?"

Forbes squirmed like a worm on a hook. "No, not exactly, boss. I mean, well, damn, Freddy says the big guy's new in town, don't know anyone and can't get into no club as a guest. He says he'll

pay a few bucks if he can get a decent place."

There was a silence. Agar seemed to be looking hard at the bartender with a disgusted expression.

"In other words, you let this Freddy use my locker for a fee, which you pocketed. How much, Forbes?"

"Five bucks," the bartender said in a low voice.

"A little honest extra enterprise," Agar said. "What was the name of the big guy who used my locker?"

"Freddy called him Chuch, boss."

"And you don't know their last names?"

"No, boss."

"You know where they live?"

"Like I said, I figure Freddy lives around here somewhere. I got the idea the big guy was in a hotel."

Shayne said, "Can you describe them?"

"Yeah. Freddy's kind of stocky, like I said, not big. He's dark, got a kind of big nose. The big guy's a bear—maybe six-two, and heavy. Like two hundred and forty pounds. He's kind of bald, maybe red hair what's left. He got a tattoo on his left hand—some name."

"That's all?" Agar said.

"That's it, boss."

"Okay, beat it fast before I start thinking too much."

The bartender faded away.

Agar swore softly under his breath. Mike Shayne stood up. Agar heard him.

"Does that help?"

"Maybe, I don't know," Shayne said. "If it doesn't, I'll be back to see if anyone else can give me more."

"Any time, Shayne," Agar said.

Shayne left the blind man sitting erect and in silence in his dark world.

VII

MIKE SHAYNE began by checking the rooming houses on the block. It was slow work. In this neighborhood anyone asking questions was shunned like a leper as a matter of course.

But after two hours he had managed to find six landlords who talked at least enough to deny that they had ever seen the two men—Freddy and Chuch—or anyone like them.

The seventh landlord thought he'd had Freddy staying in his house: "Stocky, dark guy named Fred, sure enough. Was here maybe two months. Can't say where he come from, only he acted like he knew his way around here."

"The big man? Chuch?"

"Never saw no one like him."

Shayne gave it up long enough to have a beer and a burger. Then he started the round of bars, but that was a blank, too. He finally turned to the hotels and

came up lucky after three tries.

It was the Emerson Hotel, a fly-by-night trap only a block from Al Bent's Health Club. The desk clerk, aided with another ten dollar bill, remembered Chuch without any trouble or hesitation.

"Yeah, big as a house, and that tattoo hit you in the eye. Agnes, that's what it said. Funny, a big guy like that with a name like Agnes on his hand."

"Balding? Named Chuch?"

"Like a cue-ball in front, but I never heard him called Chuch. He signed the register, G. Cholski. He had room four-ten."

"Had?"

"Checked out last night about ten. Paid cash. No new address. He didn't get no mail anyhow."

"Did he have any visitors?"

"Just that one guy you say is named Freddy. Funny, but I think I seen that Freddy around here before, maybe for a couple of years."

"Can I see room four-ten?"

"Why not?" the desk clerk said. "It ain't rented yet."

The corridor of the fourth floor was dim and smelled of age, time and sweat. Room four-ten was on the end near a dirty fire-escape window. It was not locked. Shayne went inside, closed the door, and looked around.

He did not feel optimistic. The room was as barren as a dry gulch. The furniture looked like it had been bought at a fire sale in

1890 and neglected since. The bed sagged in the middle, and was covered with a ragged bedspread that might have been white at sometime but now looked like a jaundiced shroud.

The closet held nothing but empty wire hangers, and twenty-year-old newspaper on its floor. The drawers of the bureau were lined with the same newspaper. There was no rug, and under the lumpy mattress of the bed was nothing but bare bed springs. The only easy chair sagged under time, dust and hair grease.

Shayne went through everything, into everything, and under everything. As far as he could tell, not only were the drawers and closet empty, but they hadn't had anything much in them in recent weeks. It didn't look like Chuch carried much baggage. The room had not been cleaned, but still Shayne could find nothing.

Until he moved the cracked washstand beside the small sink. Something dropped to the floor behind the stand—something that had been caught behind the stand between the stand and the wall. It was an envelope.

Shayne picked it up. An empty envelope with words written across the face: *Check out, ten; meet at Sadie's, ten-thirty; back booth.*

That was all, and it didn't help, but it was not all that the envelope showed. Neatly printed in in upper left corner was a return address:

Hotel Markham, 1410 S. Lardeo St.

Shayne pocketed the envelope and left room four-ten. He walked down instead of waiting for the decrepit elevator of the Emerson. He nodded to the clerk and went out to his car. He knew where 1410 S. Lardeo Street was.

The Hotel Markham was a lot of cuts above the Emerson, and the neighborhood where Shayne found the Markham was neat, polite and middle class. There were trees and well-dressed ladies walking with neat children. The lobby of the Markham itself was clean, new and restrained.

The clerk was reserved.

"I really can't give out information on guests," the clerk said prissily. A fat, smallish man in a dark suit, the clerk had the smooth and fussy manners of a funeral usher.

Shayne flashed his old special police buzzer and assumed an official arrogance. The clerk was just the type to crack under official anger, where a bribe wouldn't work.

"Yes you can," Shayne snapped. "This is a robbery and a murder, and we think one of your guests may be involved. Now, do you co-operate, or do I get an order?"

The clerk fluttered. "Well, it really . . ."

"Okay, I'll make it official, and we'll shake this place up until the

guests rattle." Shayne started to turn.

The clerk clucked: "Wait, now, officer, I— Well . . . What did you want to ask? Perhaps it won't violate any—anything."

Shayne turned back. He suppressed a smile and looked as grim as possible. He described Freddy and Chuch in detail.

"Have you seen anyone like that around here? Say a few days ago, and then yesterday, probably about early evening?"

The clerk, co-operative now, thought hard. He seemed to frown. "Well, that smaller, dark, stocky man does sound vaguely familiar, but I can't be sure. Your description would fit many men."

"The big one with the tattoo?"

The clerk shook his head. "I'd have noticed him, I'm sure. I did see the one I think is your stocky man with one of our guests who is a big man, but he wasn't tattooed."

Then Shayne had the hunch. Gordon Moncrief had described one of the men who had robbed him as a big man with a scar 'like a bunch of grapes' on his left hand. Moncrief had also said that this man had a stiff left arm. Shayne described this man.

"Well, yes," the clerk said, "I do recall his arm, but not any scar like that. Of course, I don't spy on guests, usually."

"What's his name?"

"Mr. Sadek. George Sadek."

He's a salesman for J. Walter Jones, Inc. Hardware, I believe."

"He's stayed here before?"

"Oh, yes."

"Is he still here?"

"No, he checked out last night about ten o'clock. Of course, his company has a sales office in Miami. He often called them."

Shayne tugged hard on his left ear. Was it a dead end, or was, perhaps, it real? Was George Sadek really a salesman for J. Walter Jones, Inc.?

VIII

THE MANAGER OF the J. Walter Jones, Inc., sales office said, "Yes! George is one of our salesmen. Is anything wrong?"

"No, just a routine matter," Mike Shayne said, trying to hold down his elation.

So George Sadek used his sales job as a cover! Sadek was a real salesman, with a real life, who had the perfect cover and alibi for moving around a lot. Shayne would bet a year's salary that there had been robberies in a lot of the cities where George Sadek did his selling.

"I see," the manager said. "Nothing involving the company, I hope."

"No, nothing like that. I just want to talk to Sadek. He lives here in Miami?"

"I'm afraid not. George works out of our home office."



"Where's that?"

"Los Angeles."

"He just visits here?"

"He swings through all our major cities. I might say that George is one of our top road men."

"A sort of road agent, huh?"

"What?" the manager said.

"Skip it," Shayne said. "Where is Sadek now?"

"I'm not sure," the manager said, "but I think I've got his itinerary for this swing. Just a minute."

The manager vanished into an inner office. Shayne waited. He was excited. It looked like George Sadek, if he was the man Moncrief had seen, and the manager had recognized the scar on his hand, was an old hand at his game and was following routine.

The manager returned. "George

was stopping in Dallas today, then swinging on home tomorrow."

"Los Angeles?"

"That's right. He's due back tomorrow afternoon."

Shayne thanked the manager and left the office. Outside in the afternoon sun he sat in his car and thought about it. He could chase Sadek to Dallas, but it was now late afternoon, and by the time he managed to get to Texas the salesman would certainly have quit for the day.

It might be difficult tracing Sadek in Dallas without alerting him to the fact that he was being traced. No, it would be better to go straight to Los Angeles and wait for Sadek to appear at his home office. That way he could be ready, and let Sadek come to him.

He went back to his office to tell Lucy Hamilton where he was going, and to have her get his tickets.

"Get me a room at The Ambassador, too."

"All right, Michael," Lucy said. "Ed Landers called. He wants you to call him."

In his private office, Shayne sat down to wait for Lucy to get Landers on the line. With any luck he'd be in Los Angeles in time for a good night's sleep and be ready in the morning. With the time difference he should even have time to study the lay of J. Walter Jones' main office.

The telephone rang. Shayne picked it up.

"What's up, Ed?"

"Nothing yet, no contact," Landers said from New York. "How about you?"

"I'm working. I think I may have the trail but it's too soon to be sure. Have the police reported anything to you?"

"Not a word, and you better stay away from them until you see what's what, eh?"

"Right. How much can I offer?"

"Ten percent and no questions."

"Okay. I'll be in touch."

Shayne hung up, thought for a moment, then dialed Will Gentry's office. The Chief was out, but he got Lieutenant McGuire.

"Anything yet, McGuire?"

"Not a smell. We ran down that description Moncrief gave, but no dice. Whoever that big guy was he isn't in our files, or in the F.B.I.'s files. We're circulating other cities, but it doesn't look good."

"What was the medical examiner's report, and ballistics?"

"Ben Monks died from a single gunshot wound in the heart. Ballistics says it was Moncrief's gun that got him."

"Any of the loot turn up yet?"

"No. We've been watching all the fences, so far nothing. And no whispers from our pigeons. That's damned unusual on a job like this. They usually can't keep a haul of that size quiet."

"No," Shayne said.

"We figure they're out of town and planning to get rid of the stuff a long way from Miami."

"But no leads yet?"

"Not a thing, Mike. What about you?"

"A few ideas. I'll be in touch soon."

When he hung up this time, Lucy had his reservations made. He had just enough time to go home and pack a bag before his jet took off.

"I'll call in tomorrow, Angel. If anything comes up before that you can reach me at The Ambassador."

"What do I tell Gentry if he calls?"

"That I'm in L.A. You don't know on what case."

Lucy Hamilton nodded, and Shayne went home to pack and catch his jet. He had an hour, and he packed quickly, slipping his automatic into the suitcase. Then he went back down to the garage under his apartment-hotel and drove out into the early evening sun.

He was half turned into the street when something like a giant hand smashed his windshield.

He ducked—and then he heard the shot.

After the windshield had shattered, smashed in flying pieces, he heard the shot—it all happened that fast.

A side window smashed far be-

hind him. His cheek burned, there was blood.

A half a block away he came to a stop, looking back, crouched low.

People were running. There were screams. Pete the desk man was running out of the apartment-hotel.

Shayne, his brain as cool as ice now that the quick seconds had passed, watched the building facing the garage exit. It was where the two shots must have come from. He saw nothing. His brain calculated: a high-powered rifle, shot from perhaps a hundred feet. Say the fourth floor of the building.

The shooter was a decent shot but had miscalculated his turn from the garage. Not quite enough lead and the first shot had hit the windshield to the right of the driver's seat. The second shot had been only desperation, and badly timed.

Pete leaned in the window. "Mr. Shayne?"

"Okay, Pete, no damage. Did you see anyone?"

"No."

A man said, "I did. A guy runnin' away around the corner from that building."

"What kind of guy?"

"Gee, I don't know. Just a guy, runnin'."

Shayne said, "Get someone to sweep the car out, Pete."

The redhead got out and strode back to where he had first had his

car hit. There was a window still open on the fourth floor of the facing building at exactly the right spot.

Shayne went up warily, but he was pretty sure that his attacker had long gone. He was right. He found the window open—a corridor window. He found marks where someone had knelt in the dust of the corridor, and two empty shells: Springfield 30-06 shells.

The building had free access, and there seemed to be no one in the offices along the corridor at this hour. Shayne went back down. His gray eyes were grim. It looked like someone was aware that he was closing in on George Sadek.

The question was—who? Sadek himself had to be in Dallas. The salesman wouldn't risk spoiling his cover by not going on with his normal routine. So had he left one of his boys—Freddy or Chuch—behind to watch, or was someone else worried? A friend of the dead Ben Monks, maybe?

Still thinking about this, Shayne returned to his car, tipped Pete for the clean-up job, and drove on for the airport again. The air blew through the smashed windshield, but Shayne hardly noticed. He was too grim and busy thinking about Sadek and Los Angeles.

IX

THE JET CAME down at Inglewood—in the dark of Los Angeles

that was never dark. A night blazing with the lights of the Southern California metropolis.

Mike Shayne was the first man off the plane, and his rented car was waiting for him. He drove straight downtown to The Ambassador and checked in. Then he went out to find the main office of J. Walter Jones, Inc.

It turned out to be a long drive, as all drives were in that sprawling mirage of a city. The Pasadena Freeway to the Golden State Freeway and off on Glendale Avenue to a busy street on the edge of Glendale itself.

The lights of the San Fernando Valley sparkled all around and below as Shayne went through the edge of the Santa Monica Mountains to Glendale. He parked a block beyond the dark office of J. Walter Jones, Inc., and walked back on the other side of the street.

The office was in a building of its own, a sprawling one-story yellow brick building with a show window in front. Shayne could see no factory anywhere. It looked like J. Walter Jones, Inc., was a jobber, and the large building was actually a warehouse as well as an office.

Shayne circled the building and noted a side entrance from the parking lot. The lot itself was fenced with a high cyclone fence, and there was only one exit. There was a loading dock in the rear,

and that was the last way out of the building. All the windows were the high-in-the-wall type that opened like awnings.

Which gave him three exits to cover. He went back to the front and peered in at the windows. It was an ordinary office, with a secretarial bullpen in the center, and partitioned cubicles all around. In the rear there were a row of solid doors with names on them.

It figured that the offices in the rear were for the big men in the company, and that Sadek would have one of the partitioned cubicles. The exit from the office section was through a double set of doors in the left rear. If Shayne got the co-operation of the company, he might be able to box Sadek in the office section and take him handily.

But it would be best to take no chances. As he walked back to his car, he decided to contact Scott-Sebastien Investigations, Inc. He had known Colonel J. P. Scott a long time, and the colonel employed the best men.

He drove home to The Ambassador, called Scott-Sebastien's night number, and left a message for the colonel to call him at once. Then he left his name at the desk, and went into the bar for a nightcap. He had a sidecar, easy on the cointreau, and relaxed. With any luck he would take Sadek easily. After that, he'd play it by ear to get the jewels back.



He was on his second sidecar when his call came through in the bar.

"J.P.? Mike Shayne."

The colonel had a voice that always sounded as if he were commanding a recalcitrant platoon. "Where are you, Mike? And what can we do for you. I assume this is business at this hour."

"I'm in L.A., J.P., and it's business. I want two of your best physical specimens for a short job tomorrow. I'm here to take a man, a private matter for Inter-Continental Insurance."

"No questions, eh? All right, you want to make some kind of deal, fine. I'll give you two men, usual fees. They'll help you take

your man, but nothing else unless I'm filled in on the deal."

"Fair enough, Colonel. Send them to The Ambassador at 7:30 A.M. tomorrow. They better be armed, but I don't want any gunplay unless it's their life."

"Will do, Mike. Do I bill you or Inter-Continental?"

"Me."

"Right," Colonel J. P. Scott said and hung up.

Shayne finished his sidecar and went up to bed.

The desk called him at seven. He was still eating breakfast when the two men from Scott-Sebastien Investigations arrived. Shayne quickly explained what he wanted, and the three men drove out to Glendale.

The office of J. Walter Jones, Inc., was not yet open. Shayne sent one of the Scott-Sebastien men to the side door in the parking lot, and the other to the loading dock.

He gave them both a good description of George Sadek. Then he sat in his car and watched the front door.

At ten minutes to nine two men appeared and opened up. Mike Shayne waited until most of the staff had entered the building—none of them looking anything like George Sadek—and then he walked in. He asked for the sales manager.

"Yes, sir?" a small, peppery man said. "Can I help you?"

Shayne showed his credentials. The sales manager looked puzzled.

"Detective? What do you want with us?"

"I'm looking for your man George Sadek."

"George? Why?"

"I think he may be involved in a burglary," Shayne said bluntly, and explained as much as he wanted the sales manager to know.

It took some convincing. The sales manager called in the executive V-P, and Shayne had to explain to him. Both men looked as if they had just lost all their teeth.

"All right. Let's give Sadek the benefit. Maybe it's all a mistake, another man who looks just like him and was seen with Freddy and Chuch. Just let me talk to him."

"All right," the exec V-P agreed. "He's due in about noon. When he shows up, I'll point him out and have him called into my office. I don't want the rest of the office staff to know anything about it."

"Fair enough," Shayne agreed, not bothering to mention the two men he had stationed at the other doors.

Then he settled down grimly to wait, his jacket open and his automatic loose. If Sadek was his man, the salesman might not be taken easily.

X

AT FIVE o'clock, Mike Shayne gave up.

He went into the exec V-P's office. "He's not coming."

"He didn't call in. That's not like George at all."

"Okay, he's my man. He got wind somehow, and he didn't show. You won't see him again. Tomorrow the police'll be after him."

"I just can't believe it," the exec V-P said.

"Check his home."

"He lives alone. A cottage up in the hills," the exec V-P said, and dialed a number.

"No answer."

Shayne turned. "If he shows, call the police and tell them to contact Chief Will Gentry in Miami."

He walked out the back way and called off one of the Scott-Sebastien men. He instructed the other to keep the front door under watch after he had left, just in case.

The three men went through the parking lot and out the front to their cars. One of the agency men drove off, the other took up a position in a nearby doorway. Shayne went to his car, making his plans for a trip to Dallas—and saw the man!

A stocky man, not big, dark skinned and with a big nose. An ordinary man in an ordinary

brown suit in the California sun. But not acting ordinary.

At the instant Mike Shayne had seen the man, the man was in the doorway of a building across the street from J. Walter Jones. He had been watching Shayne and the agency men. The instant Shayne had seen him, the dark man had started hurrying away in the opposite direction.

Shayne got into his car and started in pursuit. The man reached a car and jumped in. As he pulled away, Shayne was close behind, but not too close. From the way the man drove he did not know he was being tailed.

Shayne narrowed his gray eyes and maintained his distance as the car ahead, a red Mustang, cruised along and finally made the turn onto the freeway.

Shayne pulled closer on the freeway, and hunched over the wheel as the Mustang drove steadily on south and then west toward the sea. After a steady chase, the Mustang suddenly pulled off at the Inglewood exit and Shayne almost missed the turn.

He recovered and caught up with the Mustang at a stop light. The red car crossed Manchester Avenue and turned toward the airport. Shayne found a space in the same lot, and watched the stocky man head for the main building.

Shayne took up the tail and entered the building. The dark man

was at a counter checking his ticket. It was the Mexican Airlines counter! Shayne waited until the man had moved off and then followed him through the vast building to the waiting area.

The man went into a bar and sat at a table.

Shayne watched from a hidden corner. The stocky man, who had to be Freddy, seemed unaware of any tail. He was quietly drinking a beer and drumming his fingers on the table as if anxious to get into the air—for Mexico.

The redhead thought hard. It was pretty obvious that Freddy, if that was who the man was, intended to fly to Mexico on the next flight out. Maybe just a little too obvious.

From the man's action, he had been staked out at J. Walter Jones, Inc., to see if anyone was looking for Sadek. If that was what he had been doing, then he should have been alert to a possible tail.

Especially if he was meeting Sadek and Chuch somewhere in Mexico, which is what his actions seemed to point to.

So Shayne should buy a ticket on the same plane and follow until he was led to his other targets. It was the logical action, obvious.

But Shayne did not move. He waited while the dark man drank two beers, and then the flight was called. Non-stop to Mexico City. The man got up and openly started for the loading gate. As he

passed Mike Shayne the redhead stepped out beside him.

"Hello, Freddy."

The man jumped a foot. "What?"

"Forget the flight, Freddy. Just turn the other way and walk out to the cars. Don't be cute. This isn't my lunch in my pocket."

"Mister, I don't know—"

"Just relax. It's all nice and smooth now. Walk!"

The dark man walked. They went back through the vast spaces of the building and out into the early evening sun of the parking lot. Shayne pushed the man into his car, then searched him. He came out with a wallet and a .38 special Colt Agent pistol. The wallet contained a Florida driver's license for Fred Stoltz.

Shayne grinned. "Okay, Freddy. Now tell me all about Sadek and Chuch."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Drive," Shayne snapped.

He got in beside Freddy, his automatic in his hand. They drove north through Santa Monica and along the coast highway to Malibu. Shayne said nothing, and Freddy drove in silence, glancing at Shayne only once or twice.

"Turn off," Shayne said when they came to a narrow road that led away from the sea into the dry mountains.

After a time, Shayne ordered another turn into a dirt road that



took them back into a deep, silent box canyon where the brown hills towered all around dotted with the dusty green live oaks native to the desert-mountains.

"Stop," Shayne said.

Freddy stopped and sat behind the wheel, staring straight ahead. Shayne faced him.

"All right, Freddy. I know a set-up when I see one. You were taking me on a goose-chase to Mexico. You didn't have to be spotted back there at Sadek's office. Where are they?"

"I don't know—"

Shayne slapped the thief hard across the face. Freddy fell back against the car window.

"You know, punk. Turn out your pockets. All of them!"

Freddy turned out his pockets one-by-one. Shayne studied all the articles: money, not much; keys; a switch-blade; a box of shells for the Colt Agent; two match books from Sadie's in Miami; and a ticket book for a flight from Miami to Los Angeles.

Shayne waved the ticket. "You came in from Miami. Sadek was supposed to be in Dallas. He isn't, is he? He's in Miami. Not a bad trick, to go back to the scene. Where're the stones?"

"Go to hell!"

Shayne slapped the thief hard, drawing blood from his nose.

"I'll find them, Freddy. You know that."

"The hell you will!"

"Listen to me carefully, Freddy. I'm working for the insurance company. We want the jewels. We'll make an offer, and away you go—no questions."

"What kind of offer?" Freddy said softly, wiping his bloody nose.

"Ten percent of the insured value—that's about seventy-five thousand dollars."

"We can get a hell of a lot more than that, mister."

"No you can't. Not those stones, Freddy."

"The hell we can't!"

"Don't con me, Freddy; I know the game," Shayne said. "Those are historical stones. No one buys them except to cut up, or try to sell them to some collector who just wants to look at them in pri-

vate. And that way you don't get ten percent of their book value."

Freddy wiped at his nose, and watched Shayne like a rat wondering how far he could fool a tiger. Shayne leaned toward the dark man with his automatic displayed.

"We can go around a long time, Freddy," Shayne said softly. "And soon I'll start using the gun on you. You're nothing, Freddy, and I don't have to worry about the public. I'm not a cop."

Freddy stared at the heavy automatic, and at Shayne's cold gray eyes. The dark thief seemed to shiver.

"Okay, peeper, I'll call and pass it on."

Shayne nodded. "That's better. Let's go."

He herded the shaking Freddy back into the driver's seat and they drove off toward Los Angeles.

XI

FREDDY HAD MADE his call, and in the dark night Mike Shayne and the stocky thief were on the jet bound back to Miami. Shayne had guessed right—Sadek and Chuch were in Miami.

Freddy had reluctantly admitted that George Sadek was the leader and brains of the gang, and that it had been Sadek who set up the Moncrief thief.

"Inside job, of course. We was tipped when to hit the place."

"I know," Shayne said. "Too bad Moncrief started shooting."

"Who'd of figured the bum had a gun hid out?"

After that Freddy fell into a gloomy silence. The jet landed at Miami early the next morning. Shayne herded his prisoner to where he had left his car—the windshield fixed now in his absence, thanks to Lucy.

Freddy drove again, and Shayne watched the route. They were driving into an area of run-down factories and warehouses. Freddy drove without talking, and finally pulled up in front of a dilapidated old building that might have been a factory or a warehouse at one time.

Shayne looked around the shabby street. There were no houses, and he could see no one working in the buildings. An empty lot faced the street on one side, and deserted alleys wandered in the sun. It was a silent and abandoned part of the city. The only sign of life was a dark green Mercedes coupe parked a block away with no one near it.

"This is where they're holed up?" Shayne asked.

"Inside there," Freddy said sullenly.

"They picked a nice cosy spot."

"What you expect, a stadium? You hole up, you don't want no company."

Shayne nodded. "Okay, lead away. And don't try anything

fancy, Freddy. My gun's in my pocket, and my hand's on it."

Freddy walked ahead into the gloomy interior of the old building. Paint peeled from splintered wooden walls inside the entrance. Doors sagged and something scurried unseen in the shadows. Shayne picked his way over the debris strewn on the floor.

A dim flight of stairs led upward into a dark interior, the sun blocked out by heavy boards over the windows above. Freddy started up, and Shayne followed warily. The redhead didn't like the smell of it.

On the other hand he couldn't see what the trio of thieves had to gain by not talking to him. They had to know by now that the Moncrief loot was going to be hard to get rid of, and selling it back to the insurance company was standard procedure these days.

Freddy continued on up past the second floor, where glostly machines gathered dust and rust in the hot and stifling air of the closed building. On the third floor, Freddy turned left and started to suddenly walk faster toward a closed door at the very end of the third floor corridor.

"Hold it!" Shayne barked.

Then the redhead heard the sound to his left. He jerked around, his pistol out of his pocket. Something enormous and breathing lumbered at him like some monster. His pistol was only part

way up when he saw the massive fist coming at his face. He ducked sideways and the blow hit his right arm, knocking the automatic across the dusty floor of the corridor.

A left sizzled at the redhead.

Shayne caught the left on his right forearm, and circled sharply to the right in the gloom.

The blow on his arm numbed the arm all the way to his elbow.

Two more blows came as his attacker adjusted quickly. Shayne covered, sheltering his head behind both forearms, fighting for time to set himself.

A thunderous right buried itself in his stomach, and Shayne went over hard and sprawled flat on his back in the dim corridor light. The attacker came on, and Shayne got his break.

As the big man floundered in to finish him with a kick, he stumbled on a pile of loose boards. Shayne's hands came up like lightning, caught a thick ankle, and pulled with all his strength.

The attacker grunted, went over and hit the floor with a crash that shook the rotting building.

Shayne struggled up, still gasping for breath from the massive blow in his stomach.

His attacker recovered, came back up.

But Mike Shayne had gained his time.

He crouched, ready, and looked at his attacker for the first time.

The man was big and heavy—too fat. Massive arms and fists hung down. On the left hand there was a tattoo. The man was almost bald with fringes of wild reddish hair.

Chuch!

The giant thief lumbered forward with amazing speed, his hands held ready, and Shayne realized that the giant was a fighter. A ex-professional gone to fat and seed—that was why he needed his workout every day.

Shayne circled, watching. Chuch breathed heavily through his mouth, his thick nose blocked with scar tissue of his former profession.

"Don't be dumb, Chuch!" Shayne said, watching the big man. "I've come to make a deal."

Chuch growled, moving in stolidly, stalking Shayne in the narrow corridor.

"Where's Sadek?"

"Shut up, you," Chuch muttered, searching for his opening.

"Sadek's crazy! You can't sell those stones to anyone except the insurance company. Wise up."

Chuch made his move, a lunging left, followed by a fast, expert right. Shayne slipped the left, moved inside the right that went over his shoulder, and hit Chuch full in the face with a fast one-two-three.

The giant grunted, fell back a step, blinked and came on.

"Sadek!" Shayne called. "Call

him off! You can't make any other deal!"

Chuch bored in, lumbering yet amazingly fast. Shayne blocked the left this time, feinted Chuch's right the wrong way, and when the giant stumbled close hit him with three more fast punches to the head with all his strength.

Chuch's knees buckled. The big man swayed, shook his head. Shayne moved in, evaded a wild right lead, and hit Chuch twice more. He got set, flat-footed, and aimed carefully. Chuch went down, crashed into the corridor wall, and fell on his face.

Chuch moved weakly. There was a sound behind Shayne. He whirled. Another big man stood in an open door at the end of the corridor. Shayne saw the stiff left arm and the scar like a bunch of grapes on the man's left hand.

He also saw the pistol in the right hand.

"Sadek? Don't be a damned fool!"

Freddy stood with Sadek.

"You got to be smart, Shayne," George Sadek said, and raised the pistol.

That was the last Shayne remembered clearly: that crystal clear instant etched into his brain as George Sadek raised his pistol while Shayne stood defenseless.

The rest was a violent chaos: flashing, brutal, searing with pain and screams and the sudden horror of darkness.

He remembered this:
Sadek crumpling to the floor,
pouring blood.

The blast of a rifle: once,
twice, three times, more—

A violent blow in his face.

The floor smashing his face.

Freddy hurled backwards
sprawled out.

Pain. Incredible pain . . .
pain . . .

Darkness.

Those things—but in what order, or if they were true, he did not know. Only that he knew what came last.

Darkness.

XII

CONSCIOUSNESS returned slowly. Not slowly, but in pieces. Odd pieces of light and movement. Vague faces. Awareness of himself, that he was awake somewhere at some time.

Tubes and bottles hanging. Hands that touched him and went away. Pain.

Always pain.

Light and faces. Dark and distant movement. Moans. Some of the moans strangely from inside his head.

Random pieces of consciousness, and then, at last, the moment when his eyes opened and he knew where he was and just what had happened.

He was in a hospital and he had been shot.

The redhead licked his dry lips, tried to move and couldn't, and wondered about who had shot him. Sadek? No, he was suddenly sure of that. Sadek had been facing him and he had been shot in the back.

Sadek had been shot.

And Freddy.

It all rushed back, but still with no order. Nothing but a sense of chaos and screams and pain.

Mike Shayne went back to sleep.

When he woke up again he was not alone. He looked up into the brown eyes of Lucy Hamilton, and, behind her, the gruff face of Chief Will Gentry.

"Hello, Angel," Shayne said, and his own voice sounded strange in his ears. "How the hell am I?"

"You're fine now, Michael," Lucy said.

"A scratch," Gentry said, and grinned.

"Don't you listen to him, Michael Shayne," Lucy said. "You were shot in the back and shoulder and it was very serious."

"Bad enough," Gentry admitted. "You were lucky."

"How long have I been here?"

"Four days, Michael," Lucy said. "The doctor says you'll have to stay another three weeks at least."

Shayne growled, "We'll worry about that later. Tell me what happened, Will? How'd I get here?"

Gentry pulled up a chair for

Lucy, took one himself and sat down. "You were damned lucky, Mike. A cruise car of ours just happened to be passing that building and heard the shots. They got up there fast. Not quick enough to catch the killer; they heard him running out a back staircase. Had his car stashed in the next block."

Shayne nodded. "A dark green Mercedes coupe. Right?"

"They didn't see, Mike. They were too busy. It looks to me like they got there in time to stop any ideas of finishing you off."

"Good for them," Shayne said dryly.

"Anyway, the patrolmen reported that they found you in the middle of that corridor on your face and bleeding bad. George Sadek was dead, shot twice. Fred Stoltz was dead, too. Chuch Meggers was still groggy. The killer hadn't bothered with him."

"Any ideas?" Shayne said.

"None, really. The jewels are still missing. There was a black attache case in the room up there, and it was empty. It kind of looks like a hijack operation and nothing to go on. Chuch swears he can't tell us anything."

"What's his story?"

"I guess you know most of it. Sadek had a robbery operation going under his salesman's cover. Freddy Stoltz was a pro Sadek worked with in Miami sometimes before this. Chuch is an old pug from New Jersey Freddy recruited

for the job. He says the plan was Sadek's; there was an inside man. All the rest we know."

"Not quite. How did Sadek know I was on his trail?"

"Chuch doesn't know. All he knows is that he and Freddy were supposed to lay low here, then go for Mexico. Instead, Sadek got in touch and came back and sent Freddy to lure you off to Mexico. When it didn't work, and Freddy called with your offer, Sadek ordered Chuch to flatten you so they could get rid of you the easy way."

Shayne lay on the pillow and his gray eyes studied the pale blue ceiling. "What killed them? A rifle?"

Gentry nodded. "A 30-06 of some kind."

"That doesn't sound like a hijack weapon."

"Yes it does, Mike. That's just what a hijack gang would use in case they had to hit from a distance."

"Was there a gang?" the redhead asked.

"Who knows? We're working on that building still."

At that point a nurse came in, full of outrage, and ordered Gentry and Lucy out. Shayne looked at his secretary before she left.

"Get Max Fiddler to handle what he can of my work, Angel."

"I will, Michael."

After they had gone, Mike Shayne lay back, exhausted by the effort of talking. But his mind was



not tired. He lay there thinking hard.

Something was all wrong. He had made a standard, good offer to Sadek and his men. Why had they tried to kill him without even talking? It didn't make good sense, unless there was a factor he didn't know.

What could that factor be? He didn't know. They had no good reason to reject his deal, especially with him breathing down their necks. Where else could they have sold jewels so hard to dispose of? Who was the buyer? The killer?

And why had George Sadek come back to Miami when he had learned that Shayne was on his trail? Why not run far and fast in the opposite direction? That didn't make good sense, either. Not for a professional thief with a bag full of hot jewels.

And who was the killer? Someone after the jewels? Maybe. But the killer had to be the same man who had shot at Shayne earlier, before the redhead had gone to Los Angeles. Which made it look like the killer had tipped Sadek that Shayne was after him.

Then why kill Sadek?

And why leave Chuch alive? There was only one answer: Sadek was in some way dangerous to the killer, but Chuch wasn't!

Shayne lay for a long time thinking about it.

XIII

MIKE SHAYNE was still thinking about it two weeks later when he got out, over the strenuous objections of the doctor and Lucy.

"Don't cluck over me," Shayne snapped. "I'm okay. I know when I'm okay."

His back was still sore, but all the damage had healed and his shoulder had free movement again. With Lucy Hamilton he drove straight to his office. He was grim and edgy.

"Two weeks and four days," Shayne said to Lucy. "The trail is getting cold."

"Chief Gentry has all but closed the case, Michael. He says he hasn't any leads except to keep a flyer out for the jewels."

"I haven't closed the case," Shayne snapped.

He was irritable. Too much

time had passed, maybe too much altogether. And he still had his job to do, to find the stolen jewels and get them back for Inter-Continental.

Ed Landers at the insurance company was the first man he called in his office. In New York, Landers was glad to hear from Shayne, but that was all Landers was glad about.

"I put two of our men from here on it, Mike, after you got hit. They've turned over every rock in the country, but not a smell of those stones. We'll have to pay off next week. Moncrief's lawyer isn't happy."

"Moncrief's in a hurry?"

"No, he's being decent, but that lawyer, John Porter, is on our backs. It seems that the museums who were to get the stones are unhappy, and Porter wants to at least make them a big donation."

"Why should Porter care?"

"He's the father's executor, and there was some trouble about the will, so he's touchy."

"What trouble?"

"Don't know. You going back on the job?"

"I am," Shayne said grimly.

"Make it fast, Mike."

"I'll do my best," Shayne said, and hung up.

The redhead sat in silence, rubbing his gaunt chin as he thought. Sadek's actions just made no sense at all. Not even two weeks of thinking had made Sadek look any

better, unless Sadek had some kind of private deal that was better than the take on the loot.

After another few minutes of thought, Mike Shayne suddenly slapped his desk, and stood up abruptly. He winced. He had momentarily forgotten his wounds. Walking more slowly, he clapped his panama on his unruly red hair and went out of his private office.

"I'm going over to Tim Rourke's office, Angel."

"Michael Shayne, you should go home and—"

"I'll take it slow, Angel," Shayne promised.

He drove to *The Miami Daily News*, and went up to the office of his lean reporter friend. Rourke was working over a story. Tim leaned back and looked at Shayne.

"What are you doing walking around?"

"I don't like being shot," Shayne said shortly. "What do you have on Ben Monks, that secretary of old man Moncrief's who was killed in the robbery?"

"Not much, except maybe in the story on the robbery. Maybe we ran an obit, though."

"Take a look, Tim, will you?"

Rourke left the office, and Shayne lighted a cigarette while he waited. Rourke returned with a file and a small clipping. Shayne took them, and went to work while Rourke picked up his story again.

The obituary was brief and said almost nothing. Roy Benjamin

Monks, twenty-five, of the Moncrief mansion address, had been the private secretary to the late S. Roy Moncrief for five years. Monks was a graduate of The University of Florida. His home had been in Palm Beach prior to coming to work for Moncrief.

That was all. Shayne rubbed at his jaw. It was a briefer obituary than almost any Shayne had seen. No survivors, no family.

The robbery story added little more. Monks had inherited a small \$10,000 in S. Roy Moncrief's will, plus some family mementoes of his late employer. He had stayed on to work for the younger Moncrief.

The only other item of interest was that John Porter, the Moncrief's lawyer, reported that there had been a delay in the probate of the elder Moncrief's will due to a missing codicil that had finally been located and the will probated.

Shayne sat back. That was the second time that the will of the elder Moncrief had come up. Or the third—the bequest of the jewels to the museums had, in a way, triggered the whole robbery.

"Thanks, Tim," Shayne said as he stood up.

"Anything?" Rourke asked.

"I'm not sure yet, Tim."

"But you think there's more to the robbery than it seems?"

"Let's say the jewels are still missing, and that makes me won-

der. Someone shot Sadek, Freddy and me, and I don't buy the hijack theory."

Rourke nodded. "It doesn't look good to me, either. I could use a decent story if you turn up anything, Mike."

"You'll get it, Tim."

Back in his car Shayne wasted no time. He drove off for The University of Florida.

XIV

THE REGISTRAR of the university was annoyed, but he reluctantly looked up Ben Monks' record.

"Yes, here it is. A good student, Monks. Now, just what did you want to know?"

"What was his home address?"

"Let me see, yes, here it is: twelve thirty N. Juanita Street, Palm Beach. At least, that was his original home address when he came to us. He never changed it."

"Who paid his way?"

The registrar studied the papers. "He was a normal student, paid his own fees. Presumably from his parents. There's no special information on that. He carried a small scholarship for his last two years."

"Where do his parents live?"

"There seems to be only a mother. A Mrs. Shirley Moore, same address."

Shayne thanked the registrar and started the long drive to Palm Beach. So far there was nothing

he could see in Ben Monks' record that was unusual. Yet he was sure that Monks was the unknown factor. Why had he arranged the robbery?

Money? Maybe, but that would mean that Monks had needed a great deal of money—he had been given \$10,000 very recently.

Anger? Revenge? Maybe Monks didn't think that \$10,000 and a few mementoes was enough for him to be left by his late boss. Maybe he hadn't wanted to stay working for the son, and decided to take a few trinkets with him when he left.

Or maybe he didn't think a bunch of museums should have all those jewels. Maybe he had expected to get some of them from the older Moncrief?

Had someone fiddled with the codicil to S. Roy Moncrief's will, and cut Monks out of something?

Shayne was still thinking about it all as he drove into Palm Beach and found 1230 N. Juanita Street. It was a large, three story frame house of that old Victorian mansion style so common in Palm Beach from the richer old days. But the street was far from rich. It looked like a street that had come a long way down in the world.

Shayne walked up a weed-growth path through what had once been a fine garden to the ornate front porch. He looked for the front doorbell, but there wasn't a bell or a knocker. The redhead

opened the door and stepped into a cool, gloomy front hall.

An ancient combination hat-tree and hall table stood to the right. Straight dark chairs with square arms and high backs like thrones were scattered around. But it was the hat-tree table that Shayne stared at.

Mail was scattered over the table.

Then Mike Shayne saw the telephone on the hall wall, and the row of brass bell-buttons next to the telephone.

The place was a rooming house!

Shayne swore to himself. It was some nine years since Ben Monks had listed this house as his address. It looked a lot like there had been some big changes.

He studied the row of bells looking for the superintendent or manager, and had his second shock.

The name jumped out at him: *Apt. 1, Manager, Mrs. Shirley Moore.*

Shayne pressed the bell and waited. A door opened in the rear, and a woman stepped out and came toward Shayne. She was a small, leathery woman with a cigarette dangling from the corner of her mouth, and the eye above it permanently half closed by smoke.

"Yes?" she said, and her voice was another shock. Despite her appearance, her voice was soft and motherly.

"Mrs. Moore?"

"That's right. If you're looking for a room, I'm afraid we're full just now. Most of my people stay quite a long time. I try to make them feel at home, you see."

"I'm not looking for a room, Mrs. Moore. My name is Shayne. I'm a private detective checking into the background of Ben Monks."

Mrs. Moore brightened like a happy bird. "Ben? How is he? My it's been a long time since I saw my Ben. He was always my favorite, you know."

"Your favorite son, Mrs. Moore?"

She smiled. "I always thought of Ben as a son, but he wasn't my boy. I never had any children. I've often thought that that was why I decided to operate a rooming house. To have a lot of children, you see."

"So Monks wasn't your son? But he gave your name as his mother for the university files, and this as his home address."

"He lived here at the time, and always came back on his vacations," Mrs. Moore explained. "In a way I was a mother to him. He'd had a terrible time at his home, and walked out."

She seemed to muse for a moment, and Shayne was about to ask more, when her eyes suddenly widened. "Wasn't my son? *Wasn't!* Is Ben—"

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Moore," Shayne said. "Monks was killed al-



most three weeks ago. You didn't know?"

"No, he . . ." She sat down in one of the throne-like chairs. "He hadn't kept in touch the last few years. How did it happen, Mr. Shayne? Killed?"

"He was shot in a holdup. He was part of the holdup, Mrs. Moore."

"Part of— No! Not Ben, he couldn't have been. Why, he was a fine boy. I never knew him to want money that much."

"Was he happy in his job, do you know?"

"Yes. Yes, he loved working for Mr. Moncrief. Did he rob Mr. Moncrief?"

"In a way. Not the old man; he died a few months ago. Ben was mixed up in a gang who robbed Gordon Moncrief."

Mrs. Moore became silent. Shayne watched her.

"Was he that loyal to the older Moncrief? He might have hated the son?"

"I suppose it's possible."

"Can you tell me anything about him over the last few years?" Shayne asked.

"No, not really."

"You mentioned parents. Where are they?"

"Why, right here. They live on the other side of town. A tract development. Ben never really liked it there."

"Do you know the address?"

"I think it's in the book. Mr. Walter Monks."

Shayne found it in the book. He thanked Mrs. Moore for her help and went out to his car. A picture of Ben Monks was building up—a boy who left home at eighteen or less, gave his home address as a rooming house, and his landlady as his parent. Who got out of college and went to work for a rich man in a strange city.

Looking for an opportunity for quick loot?

It was possible. And a boy who moves around on his own so much and so early can pick up 'friends' of the wrong type.

IV

THE HOUSE OF Walter Monks was a small tract ranch-style in a row of identical houses on a quiet cul-de-sac street on the outskirts of Palm Beach. Mike Shayne parked

in the driveway, and strode to the brass-studded front door.

A man came around the side of the house

"Yes?" the man snapped.

He was a small, thin man with a ruddy face and deep eyes. There was a mean gleam in the man's eyes. He was dressed in shorts, with knobby knees that showed the dirt of gardening.

"Mr. Monks?"

"Who wants him?"

"I do," Shayne said pleasantly.

"I'm Monks. What do you want?"

"I want to know about your son."

"Son?" Monks said. "You mean Ben?"

"How many sons do you have?"

Monks laughed, a nasty laugh. "None, mister. The missus never could have kids. I got no sons."

Shayne stared at the man. Monks had known he was talking about Ben, but said he had no son?

"What was Ben, then?"

"Foster kid," Monks said. "We took him in when he was just a kid. The old woman liked kids. You know women."

"And you didn't like kids?"

"I liked Ben plenty," Monks said, and laughed that mean laugh again.

"Why did he walk out of here?"

"Who said he did?"

"He did," Shayne said.

Monks glared. "Who knows why he walked out? We used to fight,

sure, but what man don't fight with a seventeen-year-old kid? I don't know why the punk walked out, damn him."

"You didn't want him to leave?"

"Hell, no. The kid was worth plenty a month to us."

"Where did he come from to you?"

"A home. St. Michael's Children's Shelter. It's over west of here."

"You don't know who his real parents were?"

"Who cared?" Monks said, and then the ruddy man watched Shayne. "What's this all about?"

"Read it in the papers," Shayne said.

He left the man standing there swearing at his back. In his car he drove to a bar and looked up the address of St. Michael's Children's Shelter.

When he got to the shelter, he parked in a small lot beside the big, old brownstone mansion festooned with the big fire escapes mandatory for children's homes and schools. He went in the front doors and along the wide entrance corridor until he found a door marked: *Supervisor*.

Inside a pleasant looking middle-aged woman greeted him.

"Hello. Can we help you?"

"I'd like to find out about a boy you put in a foster home maybe twenty years ago, give or take a few years."

"That long?" the woman said.

"I think you'll have to talk to Dr. Devore. If I can have your name?"

"Mike Shayne. I'm a private detective."

"Oh, I see. Just a moment."

She vanished into an inner office. A few minutes later she appeared in the doorway and beckoned Shayne inside. He went and she closed the door behind her leaving Shayne with a smiling fat man who sat behind a desk about two sizes too small for his bulk. "You're a detective, Mr. Shayne? Fascinating. Which of our old boys are you inquiring about?"

"Ben Monks. At least, Monks was the name of his foster parents, and he apparently took it."

"A common practice, yes," Dr. Devore said. "Monks? Yes, I recall the boy. I kept in touch, you see. There was money involved."

"Money?"

Devore nodded. "A kind of trust fund for the boy, not enormous but adequate. We could have kept the boy here and had the money, but we always prefer a normal home if we can arrange it."

"Who was the trust fund from?"

"His mother, I believe. I can check the records."

"That might help. How old was he when you sent him to live with the Monks, and how old when he came here?"

Devore was digging into his files and spoke over his shoulder. "Let me see, I think he was six when we placed him with the Monks. He

was maybe two when he came here."

"Who was his mother?"

Devore swung around with a folder in his fat hands. "Her name was Sandra Dean. A Palm Beach girl. She was not married. She lived with her parents, but was estranged from them after the birth of the boy. Apparently she was a wild girl and rather bitter.

"She grew tired of the boy, I imagine, and brought him to us with some story about having to leave town for work. We refused, of course, but shortly after Sandra was arrested for some type of confidence game, and the court sent the child to us. About a year later Sandra was killed in an automobile accident.

"Her parents didn't want the child, and since the father couldn't be traced, we took Ben. At the time he was just another boy who had no home. Then this lawyer appeared."

"What lawyer?"

"A New York attorney named Beecham. He claimed no knowledge of exactly what he was assigned to do, except that it was to bestow a large trust fund on Ben. Officially, the fund came from the mother, Sandra."

"You don't think it did?"

"Hardly," Devore said. "She was only a girl, and neither she nor her parents had any money. I was quite sure that the money came from the father, but I've never

been a believer in forcing a reluctant father to acknowledge a child. It never works well for any of the interested parties.

"No, I was satisfied with the money, and with placing Ben in a foster home where he was wanted—if only for the money. You understand, it wasn't easy to place Ben, not with the known history of his mother."

"So you don't know the father's name or identity?"

"Not his identity, no. But we knew his name."

"You know the father's name?"

"Certainly. At least, we know the name the father was using at the time of Ben's birth. It was on the birth certificate. An unusual name; and we couldn't locate anyone of that name in Palm Beach."

"Moncrief?" Shayne said softly.

"What? Oh, why yes, that was the name: S. Roy Moncrief. When Ben came to us his mother was calling him Roy Moncrief. He was christened Roy Benjamin. For some reason, the Monks preferred to use Ben."

Shayne stood up. "Thanks, Dr. Devore."

"May I ask why you're so interested, Mr. Shayne?"

"Ben Monks was murdered three weeks ago. In a robbery. Only now I wonder about that robbery. One thing. Did Ben know his real name?"

"Not that I know, Mr. Shayne.

The Monks' brought him up as their own."

"Thanks again."

Shayne went out to his car—fast.



XVI

MONKS WAS STILL working in his garden. Mike Shayne strode up the driveway of the tract house. Monks swore at him.

"Get out of here, mister!"

"Ben Monks was murdered," Shayne snapped. "I want to know more about why he left here."

"Murdered?"

"Killed. Now why did he leave?"

"I told you I never knew. He didn't like me no more."

The side door of the house opened, and a small, slender woman stood there in a faded flowered dress. She blinked at Shayne.

"A man came here," she said. "He talked to Ben. He told Ben who his father was."

"He what?" Monks roared. "Who was he? Ben's old man, I mean? Was he rich?"

Shayne watched the woman. "Mrs. Monks?"

"Yes," the woman said. "Ben found out we weren't his folks. We'd never told him. Maybe we were wrong, but I wanted a son, and Ben was all I had."

"Who was the man?"

She shook her head. "I don't

know. Some young man. He told Ben who he was and Ben left." Mrs. Monks looked at her husband, who was glaring in fury. "Ben hated him. When he found out Monks wasn't even his real father, he left the next day."

"To Mrs. Moore's?"

"That's right. I—told him to go there. Mrs. Moore is a good woman. Ben liked her. Then he went away for good."

Monks still swore at his wife, but she just stood there as if she was so accustomed to Monks that she didn't even hear him. She seemed to be thinking of Ben Monks.

Shayne went back to his car and drove to Mrs. Moore's rooming house. The landlady ushered him into her apartment this time. Shayne got to the point.

"Did Ben ever say who sent him to the university?"

"Yes, his father."

"His father came here, maybe?"

"A man came, but he was too young to be Ben's father. Ben was happy. He told me his father was sending him to college, but want-

ed to stay in the background for a while. That's when he left."

"But he came back on vacations?"

"Until he graduated and went to work for that rich man."

"Was there anyone around inquiring about Ben at any time in the last nine years?"

"No, no one. You're the first."

"Thanks, Mrs. Moore," Shayne said.

The woman looked at Shayne. "Catch whoever killed Ben; Mr. Shayne. Punish him."

"I'll do my best," Shayne said.

Back in his car he lit a cigarette, and drove off, his gray eyes narrowed in thought. He was sure now that the whole case had been upside down all the way.

Ben Monks hadn't been killed as a result of the robbery—the robbery had been a cover for the murder of Ben Monks. Somebody had wanted Ben Monks, or Roy Benjamin Moncrief, dead.

Shayne drove from Palm Beach to Miami as fast as the law allowed, and a little faster. He drove to the Moncrief mansion. The door was opened by the cousin, Angela Peters.

"Is Mr. Moncrief in?" Shayne asked.

"Yes, I—you're that insurance investigator, aren't you?" Angela Peters said.

"That's right," Shayne said, and pushed in past the older blond. "Where is Moncrief?"

"In the library, but I don't see why—"

Shayne didn't wait to hear what the cousin had to say, but stalked on down the hall and into the library. Gordon Moncrief was there and his girl friend, Cynthia Rose. The big man was not delighted to see Shayne come barging in.

"Is your damned company going to pay me, Shayne?"

"Maybe," Shayne said bluntly. "Or maybe we'll just get your stones back."

Moncrief stood up. "Back? You know where they are?"

"Maybe," Shayne repeated. He sensed the blonde cousin behind him, and looked at Cynthia Rose still seated and watching him. He looked around at them all.

"When did you all find out that Ben Monks was old Moncrief's son? Your half-brother, right, Moncrief?"

It was as if a shock wave had slammed through the room. Angela Peters seemed to freeze like a pillar of salt. Cynthia Rose blinked as if not sure she had heard quite right what Mike Shayne had said.

Gordon Moncrief said, "Brother? Ben? You must be insane, Shayne. How dare you imply that my father—"

"Nuts," Shayne snapped. "I'm not implying anything. I've seen the birth certificate. Ben Monks was born Roy Benjamin Mon-

chief in Palm Beach. His mother was a Palm Beach woman named Sandra Dean, and his father, admitted, was S. Roy Moncrief."

Cynthia Rose said, "Good grief. You mean old S. Roy was human after all? A half-brother! Why, that's wonderful."

"Yeah," Shayne said dryly, "except the half-brother is dead. Shot by Moncrief's own gun, remember."

Gordon Moncrief had sat down. "Ben? My brother? I can't believe it!"

"Believe it," Shayne said. "The question is, did you know it? I don't buy this act. Any one of you could have known it, and killed Ben for some reason connected to that knowledge."

"Don't be ridiculous," Angela Peters cried.

Moncrief looked up at Shayne. "Why would we kill Ben? Damn it, Shayne, he arranged the robbery!"

"No," Shayne said, "I don't think he did. I think all the evidence of that was faked and planted. But that's okay, now. Now that I know about Ben, I think that the surviving robber, Chuch, can tell me who really hired him. He was told it was Monks, and he had no reason to doubt it, but now we know better, and Chuch will tell us who the real killer is."

Shayne didn't wait for protests, but turned quickly and walked

out of the house to his car. He drove off for his second call.

XVII

THE LAWYER, John Porter, had his office in a new downtown building not far from Mike Shayne's Flagler Street office. Shayne walked in and gave his name to the shining receptionist who looked at him as if he had crawled from under a rock.

"Your business, Mr. Shayne?" she said frostily.

"Just announce me, honey," Shayne said. "Porter'll see me."

The receptionist gave him two dagger-like eyes, but she worked her intercom. She muttered low, didn't like the answer, and clicked off viciously as if she felt that Porter had let her down.

"You can go in," she muttered.

"Sorry, honey," Shayne said, and strode into John Porter's office.

The lawyer stood to shake hands, "Something up, Shayne?"

"How long were you old Moncrief's lawyer?"

Porter sat down. "Why?"

"You don't want to tell me?" Shayne said.

Porter waved an airy hand. "Why not? About nine years. My father was old S. Roy's attorney for a long time and I inherited the business. A real plum for a starter."

"Why didn't you tell the police,

or me, that Ben Monks was the old man's son?"

Porter leaned forward. "Son? You must be—"

"I know, crazy," Shayne said dryly. "Only I'm not, and I'm damned surprised that you didn't know it. Old Moncrief admitted his paternity on the birth certificate. He seems to have wanted to keep it quiet, but it doesn't figure he'd keep it quiet from his lawyer."

"Well, damn it all, he did!"

"Even when he arranged for the boy to go to the university, then took him into his house as a private secretary?"

Porter shrugged. "I knew he sent Ben to college, but he always said that Ben was the son of an old friend from Palm Beach, and he felt he should help the boy."

"You didn't even have a hint?"

Porter scowled. "Now that you mention it, maybe I should have guessed something, but I didn't. What about Gordon? Didn't he know?"

"He says not," Shayne said grimly. "Maybe he is the last person the old man would have told. But you I don't get. You drew his will?"

"No, his will was drawn years ago by my father. I drew up two codicils. One that gave Ben Monks ten thousand dollars, and made a few other bequests, including that one about giving the jewels to the museums."

"And the other codicil? That the one you couldn't find?"

Porter nodded. "I drew it up about a year ago. It just spelled out the disposition of old Moncrief's voting stock in the company. It was pretty important. When Moncrief died, I couldn't find it in his house."

"He had the will and codicils in the mansion?"

"Yes. He liked to keep his own papers on hand."

"How did you finally find it?"

"Had everyone search his papers, anywhere in the house he might have hidden something. Angela Peters finally found it in a kind of secret drawer in his desk along with some other private papers."

"Convenient," Shayne said bluntly. "Can I see that codicil?"

"Of course," Porter said, and swung to his files. He came out with a simple one-page document typed on a standard IBM typewriter. "It's our typewriter, in case you have some ideas of forgery."

Shayne studied the paper. It looked legitimate. There were no alterations that the redhead could see. It left all the voting stock to Gordon Moncrief. It was signed by S. Roy Moncrief, witnessed by John Porter.

"How about the signatures?"

"He signed it in front of me, Shayne."

"Let's see the main will."

Porter showed him the will. He studied the signatures. They looked the same to him. Porter's was identical, as far as he could tell, but Moncrief's? He wasn't sure. Men's signatures did vary somewhat. It was close enough to require an expert to say yes or no.

"They look okay," Shayne admitted.

"Of course they're okay! Don't you think I know the paper I drew up and witnessed?"

"Yeah," Shayne said, "I guess you do. But this new fact about Monks changes the whole picture, Porter."

"Changes it? How?"

"It's a lot too much coincidence, with the rest of what I know. Monks didn't arrange the robbery. Sadek and the other two came back to Miami when they knew I was after them, when by all reason they should have run the other way—if it had been a robbery alone."

"I see your point, but—"

"They came back here because they had business here," Shayne snapped. "They had a reason, and that reason had to be to come back to the man who really hired them and set it all up. They lured me into a trap when they had every good reason to deal with me. They were protecting someone else."

Porter was silent. At last he said, "What do you expect now, then?"



"Knowing what I know, I expect Chuch can tell us who really hired the three of them. The killer made a mistake leaving Chuch alive. Chuch told me some things that made no sense while we thought Monks had hired him, but they do now."

"You think this Chuch can point out the murderer?"

"Not in so many words, but he can lead us to our man."

Porter nodded. "Let me know, Shayne. I want to see those jewels go where they belong."

"I will," Shayne said.

He left the lawyer musing at his desk, and went out into the evening sun.

In his car he drove toward police headquarters. There was nothing to do now but arrange the details of his plan with Gentry.

XVIII

WILL GENTRY listened to Shayne's plan, and shook his head.

"Damn it, Mike, that's a real dangerous plan."

"It's all we've got," Shayne insisted. "He'll get off scot free, Will, unless we can trick him. We don't have a prayer of getting him now, and not a prayer of getting those stones back."

"Chuch can't tell us anything?"

"What do you think? You've been working on him for almost three weeks. He just doesn't know."

"How do you know it'll work?"

"I don't. It's a chance."

Gentry considered for a long time. What Shayne had asked was dangerous, and could bring the whole city down on the Chief's neck.

But, finally, Gentry stuck a fresh black cigar into his mouth, chewed it, and said: "Okay, Mike. Let's stick my neck out all the way."

The Chief picked up his telephone and talked for a long time to the head man at the city jail.

Two hours later, Mike Shayne was knocking on the door of John Porter's house. The lawyer opened the door himself. He stared at the wild-eyed Shayne.

"What the devil—" Porter began.

Shayne pushed past him and began a fast, but careful search of the house. It was a small house, and did not take long. Porter followed at his heels talking, demanding.

"Damn it, Shayne, what is this?!"

The redhead finally checked all the windows, and found them locked. Then he turned on Porter.

"Chuch Meggers just escaped. Over an hour ago. He's armed."

Porter stared. "He escaped? But—"

"I was trying to make him remember enough to lead us to the killer. I told him we'd go easy on him if he helped us get the stones and the killer. He seemed co-operative at first, but then he changed."

"Changed? What do you mean?"

Shayne paced, swearing. "I blame myself, damn it. I figured him for just a scared, dumb punk. I made it pretty clear that we didn't know who the killer was or who had the stones. That he was our only hope. I think he figured out that he was the only one who knew where the stones could be and that that gave him a chance to get a big cut for himself."

"You mean, you think he broke out to find the killer and the jewels?"

"That's what I think."

"And you came here looking for him?"

"You're on my list," Shayne said grimly. "I'm staying around to see if he does come."

"Damn you, I—" Porter began.

The ring of the telephone stopped him. Both men stared at the telephone. Shayne motioned

to Porter to pick it up, and jumped out into the hall to get the extension. Porter hesitated only a second, and picked up the receiver.

"Mike?" Gentry's voice said.

"Here, Will," Shayne said on the extension.

"I've got a report he's been seen over near Moncrief's mansion. Get over there fast! You can do it faster than we can from where you are and . . ."

Porter broke in, "It's only about ten minutes from here!"

"Get going!" Gentry snarled.

Shayne hung up and ran toward the door. Porter was with him. The lawyer was pale.

"Gordon? You think it's been Gordon all along?"

"Or someone over there," Shayne said grimly. "Do you have a gun?"

"I'll get it. You get to your car. I'll get my own and you can follow me. I know the fastest way."

"Right," Shayne said.

He ran for his car. Moments later Porter's car appeared. The lawyer waved a pistol at Shayne, and then gunned the black Buick away into the night.

XIX

THE TWO CARS pulled silently up to the Moncrief mansion at the same moment. Mike Shayne jumped out. Lights were on all through the house. Will Gentry

had obviously called to warn Moncrief and the others.

"Inside," Shayne snapped.

Porter ran ahead of the detective into the mansion. They went to the library where Gordon Moncrief stood alone, his P-38 in his hand.

"What is all this, Shayne? Gentry called and said this Chuck Meggers had broken jail and might be coming here! Why would he come here?"

"You tell me, Moncrief," Shayne snapped.

Porter said, "Gordon, Shayne thinks that this Chuck knows who really hired him to steal your jewels, and is coming to make some kind of deal for a share."

"Here?" Moncrief said. "Why would he come here? You think Monks didn't hire them?"

"I'm sure he didn't, but only Chuck can prove it," Shayne said. "As for coming here, you can tell me more about that than anyone else."

"The devil you say! If you're implying that I murdered Ben you're out of your mind!"

Shayne was grim. "We'll find out soon enough. But if you did, you better be careful. Where's Miss Peters?"

"Somewhere in the house. So is Cynthia."

Porter said, "We'd better find them!"

"Right," Shayne agreed. "No

telling what Chuch will do; he's not too stable."

"I'll look in the back," Porter said.

"I'll go upstairs, Moncrief said.

"That leaves me the front," Shayne said.

The three men split up and each went to his own area of search.

In the dark front of the house, Shayne moved warily, his automatic out. After a few minutes he looked at his watch. Then he walked around to the side of the house. He moved warily as if searching for Chuch, like a man who expected a desperate escaped thief to emerge from the bushes at any second.

Unseen, and silently, he made a motion with his left hand: a slow tugging on his left ear.

Almost at once there was a sound of crashing in the thick bushes around the dark grounds. Someone big was coming toward the house. Shayne crouched alert, his automatic aimed toward the sound.

Then the sound seemed to stop—and continued softly. The man in the bushes was now creeping warily to the open space between the bushes and the mansion. Shayne melted into the shadows, waited.

Suddenly the man appeared.

A big man, moving lightly now and without a sound as he came

out into the open. He passed through a shaft of light from the windows of the mansion.

It was Chuch.

Shayne stepped out. "Hold it, Chuch!"

The big man froze.

In the deep silence, as the two men faced each other, there was the sharp snick of a rifle bolt.

Shayne whirled.

Chuch stared dumbly toward where the sound seemed to have originated.

The whole night seemed to wait.

Then there was a wild crashing off in the shadows at the rear of the mansion, at the point where the rifle bolt had clicked. Voices shouted. Men swore. One voice rose higher than all the others:

"Damn you! It's a trick! You can't prove—"

Shouting, swearing, protesting, John Porter was wrestled out of the shadows into the light from the windows. The lawyer struggled in the grip of two large policemen. Will Gentry and Lieutenant McGuire, guns in hand, came grimly behind the shouting Porter.

"He fell into it, Mike," Gentry said. "Damn, but it all worked."

Porter glared hatred at Shayne. "You! You thought this up! Damn you! I'll fight it!"

"Go ahead, Porter, fight it," Shayne said, and he stepped forward and took the 30-06

Springfield rifle from Will Gentry. He held the weapon by the muzzle, and looked with a grim smile at the telescopic sight.

"This ought to do it," Shayne said. "I guess he had it hidden in his car."

"Yeah, we're checking the car out now, Gentry said."

John Porter still cursed and struggled as Gordon Moncrief came to stare at the lawyer.

The next morning Will Gentry swivelled in his office chair.

"The rifle killed Sadek and Fred Stoltz," Gentry said, "and it was the one fired at you on the street. We found the green Mercedes in a garage where Porter had left it. The garage man identified Porter.

"Chuch can't help us, he never saw Porter, but we won't need him. We found the jewels in the Mercedes. He'd thought up a dandy hiding place, a fake double carburator with a fake second tail pipe and muffler. The stones were inside the fake muffler under the Mercedes."

Shayne nodded. "That'll clinch it. Chuch can swear that Sadek had the jewels just before he was shot in that warehouse. So that proves Porter did it."

"Yeah, he knows he's licked. We can't get him for Monks, of course, no proof at all. But we'll nail him cold for Sadek, Freddy, and the attempt on you. He knows it, so he talked."

"Let me guess," Shayne said.

"Old man Porter acknowledged Ben Monks as his son in that codicil that was missing. For some reason this was dangerous to Porter, so he forged a new codicil. But Ben Monks smelled something wrong. Maybe he knew that the old man was going to have something special in his will. When the codicil didn't say anything, Monks was about to start a stink."

Gentry nodded. "Yeah, that was it. Porter had been stealing from the company. Ben Monks knew something was bad, but had no proof. But the real will left him half the voting stock, and he'd have been in a position to ruin Porter.

"Porter only found out that Ben was on to him the day the old man died. So he 'lost' the codicil and forged a new one. But he was still afraid of Monks, so he arranged the robbery, shot Monks with Moncrief's gun, and hoped for the best."

"His big mistake was trying to keep the jewels. He just couldn't resist," Shayne said. "Right? So he killed Sadek and Freddy. First to remove the only man who knew him—Sadek. Second, to get the jewels for himself."

"He just got greedy," Gentry said.

"That gets them all in the end," Shayne said.

Then the redhead went out to report to Ed Landers.

*It was a dismaying sight, defying belief.
While a shocked nation watched, a rocket
blasted suddenly, without reason into the
Unknown—propelled by no human hand!*

THE UNWANTED ASTRONAUT

by TOM H. MORIARTY

ON L-DAY minus 3, John Farragut and his wife Constance drove in to Riviera Palms and headed for the beach motel which was operated to accommodate the brass who visited nearby Launch Site II.

Farragut knew the motel, having stayed there a number of times in connection with his work as a project officer for the Meritex Corporation of St. Louis, designer and builder of missile system components for the government.

A bouquet of asters, with a card of welcome, greeted the young couple in their room overlooking a sparkling stretch of golden sand and emerald surf. The flowers were courtesy of Harlan Knudsen,

resident engineer at Launch Site II for Meritex, and of Bill Craemer public relations director of the government facility.

The card message was a reminder for the Farraguts to be sure to drop in on a "must" cocktail gathering that evening at a nearby beach mansion.

To John Farragut there was something of a thrill in this current assignment. The thrill was there because his wife was with him for a change and could see for herself that his weeks and weeks of eighteen-hour work days had compensations of a sort other than money. The beach and a round of sightseeing with new friends would delight her in the busy days ahead.



The tense atmosphere of a test launch was excitement enough in itself for him.

In this mood of well-being, Farragut turned on the TV set and sat down to kill time while Constance freshened up. A minute went by before Farragut realized that the television tube refused to light up.

Though this situation would be

impossible for the ordinary man to remedy, it offered no bafflement for the Meritex engineer. He had designed TV circuits at one stage of his career in electronics since graduating from Ann Arbor nine years ago.

In a short while he had the innards of the set perking again. A sharp-focus picture greeted his

wife when she stepped forth ready for her vacation to begin.

Launch Site II and its environs made up the empire of a new breed of American pioneers: the young specialists who were dedicated to solving the unknowns of space.

Like John Farragut, they were mostly lean of figure from exhausting hours at their tasks. Theirs was a world of relentless concentration, picking the survival locks inherent in mathematics and physics.

When the Farraguts walked in to the social scene, they blended at once with the assembled new breed, with the assurance that comes in belonging to a club of limited membership.

Outside of the mansion, however, the boundaries of this club ended. Separated by a thick lace-work of red bougainvillea, the members of another kind of club cavorted. Children raced in and out of breaking waves, guitars and ukeleles crossed musical racket in the breeze, the screams of playful young people accented a general commotion of fun.

Bill Craemer explained the people next door to Constance Farragut.

"That's our employees' recreation beach. Wonderful, isn't it? A great morale builder for the office people particularly. Does a person good to get out there in the sun and wind."

John Farragut was looking at

the antics of a short young woman, creeping up behind a young man who sunned himself flat on the sand. Splash went her can of cold sea water on Tarzan's torso. Away went the young woman, running for her skin, pursued by the young muscle man.

Farragut said, "How can you ever get that relaxed?"

Craemer looked, saw the horse-play, and said, "Those two nut-balls are newlyweds at that."

"A romance in the best Pentagon tradition," said Constance Farragut.

Her interest reflected Bill Craemer to run out the tale further.

"You'd never in a month of Sundays guess what brought those two together," he said. "Alligators. She was clowning around at the side of a pond in one of those tourist alligator sideshows. She slipped and almost fell in. The owner saved her, in quotes. The owner turned out to be one of our guards with a sideline enterprise."

In St. Louis, John Farragut was thinking, this kind of an adult play-pen for the low-priced help might not be a bad idea. It might promote better industrial relations.

He and Constance joined the reception line which was now forming, to shake hands with the guest of honor, Lieutenant General Robert W. Duffy, and continue on the smorgasbord trail. Duffy, the Pentagon's No. 1 observer for the forthcoming Meritex launch, was

the reason this cocktail reception had been pegged as a must.

An hour later, the half light outside the mansion suddenly dimmed fast and the shrieks of running people welled up from the beach and then went silent. A bluish front of low clouds rode for the shore on the fierce gusts of herald winds.

"Rain," said Craemer, "but don't worry. It will be gone by Minus One and clear as a bell on L-Day."

"Are you sure we can continue our checkout tomorrow in the rain?" said Farragut.

"No problem. The ground equipment huts have been insulated since you were here last."

John Farragut was glad to hear that. The last time he had supervised a run-off of tapes on missile functions, he had come away from the temporary ground equipment structures brown and dusty with sand that had penetrated window cracks and doors. He had been forced to call a stop of the systems check-out for five minutes in order to be certain that he had not missed a sequence of the tape.

And this time, he knew, the stakes involved were far, far greater. The capsule was large enough inside to hold a man, but no man would take the sky ride this time. The *Co-Fo-Tron*, as it was popularly styled, would be triggered to its duties by remote control from ground stations.



around the globe. If it worked properly, it would transmit in orbit and pinpoint its code messages successively to de-coding machines in U.S. embassies in line of flight.

The method, if successful, would greatly reinforce confidential communications now being made by radio, teletype, or cable—all of which were vulnerable to jamming or tapping. With an astronaut riding *Co-Fo-Tron*—as in times of national emergency or actual war—the man would engage in a number of military missions designed to confuse the enemy or interdict his space communications.

Back at the motel, Farragut said to his wife, "How do you like it so far?"

"That recreation beach intrigued me," she said. "I wouldn't mind a secretary's job here myself."

"Okay. I'll arrange it," he said in feigned seriousness. "Then you can give me a hot foot some day down at the beach."

THE SUN was not to be seen in the early morning when John Farragut tiptoed out of the motel room and began the short, wet walk to the entrance gate of Launch Site II. Rain painted the entire sky dome a dreary grey. The oncoming bluish front of yesterday evening was now a complete canopy of sodden clouds.

Nevertheless, it was only L Day minus two, so Farragut was not downhearted. He entered the observation blockhouse and approached a group of men at a window. Harlan Knudsen and Bill Craemer; two Air Force colonels, Ladislaus Zyczski and Stanley W. Thomas; and the commandant of the site's security guard, Edward Venn, were having coffee awaiting his arrival.

He joined them, saying, "Nice weather for ducks and system inspectors."

Outside the window, the two rings of security space were visible despite the steady pour of rain. Each ring was ten to twelve yards in depth and was separately monitored by guards in their tiny sentry cubicles.

The effect was of two circular

bands, and in the center, the towering rocket itself.

Ground equipment huts spotted the band of space in the outer ring. Power cables ran from these huts into the innards of the gantry and then out of the gantry to hang loose at various levels of the rocket contour.

Working mechanisms were ready for attachment by the experts. Routine check-outs, by means of tapes to be operated in the ground equipment huts, were ready to begin when the people at the observation window finished their coffee.

Several technicians moved about in the misty picture before the observing group. They were the men who had worked during the night hours to make things shipshape, ready to take final connections. Guards in their boxes checked the credentials of new arrivals and passed them through.

It was a sight to please the most exacting scientific mind: everybody and everything in its place, and right on schedule to check the pre-countdown evidence of the weapon's fitness to fly.

It was a sight for three more seconds.

Then it turned into a sight of horror, defying reason.

Pencils of dark smoke hissed out savagely from the vents of the First Stage fuel storage compartments, indicating "ignition on." An earth-shaking rumble sounded out

and clouds of exhaust smoke squirmed and swirled white and red and hid the rocket's base.

Gently, at first, came the invisible lift of the giant hand of pure power. This rocket was not about to be checked out any more. It was on its way.

People in the security rings ran for their lives.

"Holy Christopher," yelled Harlan Knudsen.

The others, including Farragut, were too stunned to say a word. In utter fascination, all watched the metal bird accelerate upward—faster, faster—and quickly disappear into the rain clouds.

In every mind was the question, *Why?*

John Farragut was first to regain his sense of responsibility and do something. His work on *Co-Fo-Tron* accounted for that recovery. He knew every rivet and fitting of the missile. He was not now thinking of the loss in millions of dollars, though that was stupendous. He was considering that the design was supposedly foolproof. And if it were not, then many other rockets, in firing silos and on hardstands, were not.

Farragut said to the commandant, "Assemble every person who was in the security areas. Our first job is to account for everyone." In Farragut's mind was the chilling thought that the rocket may have fired itself by some method now unknown.

Colonel Zyczski said to Colonel Thomas, "Contact General Duffy in his quarters and report the incident."

Colonel Thomas said nothing and walked away. To Farragut this was evidence enough that Zyczski's date of commissioning as full colonel pre-dated Thomas's by at least twenty-four hours. No military officer likes to be the bearer of bad news to his commander.

Farragut, who had met and chatted with the bluff Duffy, could just hear the old boy blowing a fuse with, "What kind of a thing you telling me? Are you drunk, man?"

Bill Craemer said to Farragut, "John, I suggest that you get in touch with your top people and have them hurry down from St. Louis. There's bound to be a full-scale investigation ordered in the next half hour. This kind of thing never happened before at Launch Site II. We've got to keep it from ballooning into a national disgrace."

The PR man ran off to his office, where, Farragut knew, he could expect to see his switchboard lit up like a Christmas tree as the newspaper wire services, radio-TV newsmen, and assorted editors tried to get clarifying information all at once.

More important than getting in touch with his own superiors, Farragut now judged, was to learn how the commandant came out

with his muster roll. Then he would have something specific to talk about when he phoned to St. Louis.

In the ready room of the guard, Farragut came upon the people who had been in the security areas: three Air Force tech sergeants, two civilian technicians of Meritex, and three security guards of Launch Site II.

No other names showed on the sentry box rosters. All who had entered were present and accounted for.

To Farragut this meant that only two things could possibly have happened. (1) An interloper, disguised as a technician, could have broken site security some hours ago and remained hidden in the capsule itself when the gantry was detached last night. Inside the capsule, this man could have manually fired the rocket, for the mechanism was there in anticipation of future use by an astronaut. Such a man would have had to be an expert, versed in the new-type controls. (2) The alternate happening was more puzzling to contemplate: the complex of the go-switch had triggered itself through some freak of electronics.

The latter was a most discouraging consideration to Farragut. Such an incident was generally regarded as impossible. Numerous safeguarding features were incorporated in this design. Scientists had some time ago voiced fears

about the possibility of a remote triggering, such as by equipment in fishing trawlers or in miscellaneous vessels of foreign powers, including submarines. The scientists had also feared remote triggering by sophisticated low frequency wave beams, such as used in police, taxi, and commercial communications systems distant from the site.

Farragut's spirits faded. Soaked to the skin now, he walked slowly back to the motel. It was still early in the morning. Rain had camouflaged the flight of the errant rocket for people about a mile from the launching pad.

So far there just was not big excitement in the air here. Perhaps the local people had thought some kind of engine test was being run. Farragut grimaced at the thought of this contradiction.

When he walked into the room, Constance said to him, "So the general couldn't wait? Well, it certainly looked from here like a perfect blast-off. I was in the bathroom and I heard a rumble and looked out and—"

"I know," said John Farragut. "The operation was a success. But the patient died. Meaning me, you, us."

THE BOARD OF INQUIRY convened at 1234-hours in a corner of the observation blockhouse on Launch Site II.

Outside the windows, John Far-

ragut watched another huge rocket being bunted in to the gantry. This was the way they did it at Site II, treating the shots as work-a-day jobs and saving the fanfare of press coverage and news releases for the firing of manned project "originals." Which was one reason why a sizable number of people of Riviera Palms were still unaware that a fantastic booboo had taken place in connection with *Co-Fo-Tron*. These people assumed that L-Day minus two had simply been changed to L-Day itself and the big bird lofted ahead of its initial schedule. PR Chief Craemer was not yet publicly blueprinting what had really happened.

Lieutenant General Robert W. Duffy, who was president of the board, instructed his recording secretary, Warrant Officer Nathan Bernstein, to forget about protocol for the time being and fill in the necessary flourishes on the official transcript later. The general then swore in everybody simultaneously and began his three-hat role of judge, attorney, and jury. His two board member assistants, Colonels Zyczski and Thomas, were listeners for the most part henceforth.

Farragut wondered at the unorthodox streamlining, and hoped that it would be beneficial.

"Who speaks for Meritex Corporation?" said General Duffy.

"I do," said Carson Bidlaire, the aerospace supplier's president.

Bidlaire was old for this young game. He was fifty-two and right now looked sixty-two: drawn, tired, nervous, not in character as a space leader. Farragut well knew that Bidlaire's enthusiasms had never particularly been for the new young breed of engineers.



The president had let it be known that he did not believe sound judgment automatically came with young brains.

"Divers in the Bahamas have found the capsule," said Duffy. "But there's nobody in it. Is it true that the rocket's go-switch has to be manually operated to start ignition firing in this particular design?"

"John Farragut is the designer. I suggest he make the explanation," said Bidlaire.

"Okay. Proceed, Farragut."

The young project officer explained that the manual method was necessary unless the go-switch was locked out temporarily in favor of a remote turn-on switch from a ground equipment hut.

"The go-switch was probably locked out, inasmuch as the rocket was to be fired unmanned," Farragut summed up.

"I don't like this 'probably' stuff," said Duffy. "Who knows whether it was locked out or not? Speak up, Meritex people."

"The go-switch was locked out," said Harlan Knudsen. "I saw it when I made my own unofficial make-ready check-out on L-Day minus four. And the remote switch in the hut could only be operated by a two-key simultaneous turn-on. Colonel Zyczski had one key, Colonel Thomas the other. Both officers were in the blockhouse with Farragut and me when the ignition snapped on."

An hour later the board of inquiry had not uncovered anything beyond the resident engineer's statement, in spite of the general's badgering of witnesses Knudsen; Knudsen's assistant, James Sesson; Farragut; Bidlaire; and George Lonson, vice-president of Meritex.

General Duffy turned to the subject of the security guards and their actions and whereabouts at the time of ignition and blast-off.

"I have verified each and every entry in the gate log books," explained Edward Venn, commandant of the guard. "The only names on log since 0001-hours today are the people authorized to enter and they were accounted for in the flesh by a muster roll taken

only minutes following the blast-off."

"Guards Harry Dunne, Fred Messinger, Martin Hannah," said Duffy. "Did you notice any incident or any departure from the usual during the period of your watch?"

A chorus of "No, sir," was heard.

Farragut noted in passing that the guard Martin Hannah had been the man noted on the recreation beach by Bill Craemer: the big fellow who had received for a bucket of sea water from his wife.

"Was anybody close enough to the rocket to observe what was being done by the technicians immediately before ignition?" pursued Duffy.

"I was," said Martin Hannah. "The last man in the gate, he left his clip-board by mistake, so I took it to him inside the security area. I'd say about ten feet from the rocket cradle. Then I returned to the gate."

But inquiry in this and several other directions was futile and at length General Duffy grew weary of re-tracking over the same ground.

"It is my judgment," the general stated suddenly, "that the missile *Co-Fo-Tron* was faulty and in some now unknown manner fired itself. Board of inquiry members, do you agree?"

The colonels agreed in two words each.

"But we haven't seen the retrieved capsule itself," protested Carson Bidlaire. The official half arose in his chair from the shock of the sudden decision by the court. Farragut judged that to Bidlaire the situation was like watching a hundred million dollars in greenbacks go up in flames.

"There will be other inquiries," Duffy said coolly. "I gave you the result of this one."

"I want to add to the official record," said Bidlaire, "that the Meritex Corporation is entitled to and expects to get a more searching investigation before final judgment—"

Bill Craemer interrupted the man, saying, "There will be no press release, sir, unless it comes through higher authority in Washington."

"Correct," said Duffy. "This court of inquiry is terminated."

"Nevertheless," said Bidlaire angrily, "you may have signed our death warrant, General. I intend to contact Washington myself."

"As you will, sir," Duffy replied stiffly. "Come along," he added to his entourage. "Warrant Officer Bernstein will sort out, amend, and publish."

"So that's what they call an investigation," said Farragut disgustedly. "One man making up everybody's mind."

Bidlaire and Lonson were too beat to reply. They moved off as in a daze. Farragut, Knudsen, and

Sesson remained as sole wreckage on the Inquiry beach.

"For my money," said Knudsen, "a body is going to float to the surface of the ocean in the Bahamas and when it does that general is going to be mighty red behind the ears. There had to be a stowaway in that capsule, John. Only a stowaway could have unlocked the damned go-switch and thus taken starting precedence away from the remote switch in the hut."

"So say I, Harlan," said Farragut. "You heard Bill Craemer's preliminary report from the Bahamas. The capsule was open, flooded, empty—and that proves beyond a doubt that this unwanted astronaut survived re-entry, blew open the escape hatch, and either got away or was drowned. Probably drowned."

Knudsen and Sesnon went their separate ways. Farragut remained, staring out of the observation windows, watching the busy technicians who worked at bedding down the new candidate on the pad. But there was no inspiration for Farragut in the scene. The "official" failure of his project gave to everything an atmosphere of meaningless robotry. Before, these workers down in the security areas had been people to him, special people with their own portions of the special dream showing up in their willing, lively actions.

A page call for Farragut now

came over the blockhouse p.a. It was from Bill Craemer.

"Just to let you know," said Craemer, "that your bosses have filled in a flight plan for Washington and will clear the field in ten minutes. Thought you might want to get a last message to them."

Farragut thanked his friend, saying, "The less brother Bidlaire sees of me the better, Bill. Fate has apparently put me in the same club as the football player who blacked out and ran the ball the wrong way."

In this depth of despondency, John Farragut decided to go back to the motel and tell his wife to start packing. He could not stomach the idea of sitting around any longer in the scene of nightmarish disappointment.

A note awaited Farragut at the motel. Constance said she was out doing some shopping and sightseeing. "Back soon."

Farragut quickly stowed his own gear in the one big suitcase. For want of something to kill time, he sat down before the television set with a vodka and juice drink. He switched on the set from force of habit, then lowered the sound to zero, and faintly amused himself watching the silent chewing of scenery by performers in an old movie. This gambit was also from force of habit: a silly habit of the former hardship years, getting started in a small apartment with paper-thin walls, where the land-

lord forbid radio and TV after 10:30 at night. It was an apt reminder at this time, with a built-in chill of apprehension.

Triggered by the silence, John Farragut was at last able to think about the disaster from the more helpful viewpoint of spectator rather than of direct, hurting participant.

In the next half hour he came to certain conclusions. One was that the scientific personnel, serving on the pre-count down program of *Co-Fo-Tron*, should be eliminated as potential causes of the disaster. Their lives since the advent of missilery had been dedicated to efficiency. They were patriots of a new pattern—well-paid patriots.

Their all-consuming aim in life was to help overcome the temporary lead of the Soviet scientists. They were not people to be so careless as to monkey around with a locked-out go-switch.

A companion conclusion was that the non-scientific people who assisted were also dedicated, but in a different, necessarily more limited way. When the work shift ended for administrative helpers, the guards, and base maintenance people, they cut off completely from the dream of conquering space. They resumed places in the ordinary world of personal chores, fun, hobbies, and small ambitions.

Thus, in the expanded reasoning of John Farragut, factors for evil could enter more easily

through these semi-dedicated people, the ones who would not have a round-the-clock sense of responsibility such as peculiar to the scientific personnel.

The general had booted the ball, John Farragut decided. The general had brushed aside possibilities of errors being made in this level. It was possible to rationalize that the living situations of non-scientific people might encourage fools, criminals, or foreign agents to try to take advantage through them, through some unknown weak link in the chain of security.

General Duffy had not delved deeply; he had been content to accept generalizations about groups of people. His half-baked investigation had allowed no time nor desire to consider the entry of known causes of crime, such as bribery, blackmail, and psychopathic yearning for status.

Just about then, Constance Farragut returned home. Intuition had evidently told her to go out and shop and sightsee while there was time left, because an inquiry was usually synonymous with trouble. She listened to her husband and showed no disappointment at his decision.

"Why shouldn't we go on home?" she said, in a manner of comforting him. "You see one coconut palm and you've seen them all. Oh, yes, I took in the alligator show and they can have those awful creatures, too." She started

at once to empty shopping packages and souvenirs into the suitcase.

John Farragut was thankful for her swift reaction. He speculated now that the bright side of life could possibly make its appearance again, driving up the highway, on west through the turpentine trees, and dousing disappointment by action itself. He wondered just how he could manage to vacate the motel premises quietly and thus pass up the customary farewells to Knudsen, Sesson, Craemer, and other friends.

Constance shook him out of his thoughts.

"Eeek," she cried shrilly and ran like a scared child into his embrace.

"What?" He judged the scare had something to do with the suitcase and he went to the open folds of leather. Something small and wriggly crept unseen under a blouse. Yet it was enough to scare the living daylights out of a woman unaccustomed to crawling animals or reptiles in any form.

Farragut plucked a scarf from the pile of articles and floated it down over the intruder's path—then swiftly grabbed it inside the folds of cloth, captured.

"Whoever he is, this little guy must have come home with you," said Farragut. "Don't worry; he's probably harmless."

"Take it away," Constance cried.

Farragut opened the window and unfurled the scarf. As he did so, he looked hard and his mind flashed with a thought.

"Wait," he said. "What's the name of that alligator place?"

Her mind was not up to thinking clearly yet. She did not reply.

"Take me where you were," Farragut ordered. "Don't ask any questions. Hurry up."

In a few minutes, Farragut was at the off-street compound of the Hannah Alligator Show, high-boarded to prevent free peeks by tourists at the simulated piece of tropical swamp. Big Martin Hannah appeared imposing at the turnstiled gateway. Farragut asked the key question at once. Hannah's answer was just as prompt.

"We got a lot of them reptiles in there. They are natural friends with my alligator."

"Is Mrs. Hannah here?"

"Right inside, waiting to give her lecture. Step in, folks. No charge for Meritex friends."

Bitsy Hannah was overawed at first at the idea that a ranking Meritex official and his wife should turn up. She knew of John Farragut by reputation. But she talked freely, and that was all that mattered.

"Just a little joke on Martin," she said. "I put a little no-account lizard into his raincoat pocket that morning. I thought he'd get a laugh when it popped out of his coat. Like it was 'raining cats and

dogs,' 'lizards and alligators', get the joke?"

John Farragut "got the joke" as completely as Martin Hannah had got the joke of the can of chilly sea water on the beach.

"In the rain your husband never saw it pop out," said Farragut. "But it did. And when they bring that capsule back to the lab tomorrow, we are going to see just how far the little guy got.

"I'll tell you how far Mr. Lizard got when he jumped out of the raincoat. He slithered across the ground to the gantry, up the gantry in the rain, and down a cable to a capsule connection on top of the rocket. He entered the capsule, as only a lizard could do at that stage of the check-out—and crept across a two-foot space with his wet feet, the two-foot space between the ground connection and the positive throw-connection of the go-switch.

"His wet feet and body left a trail as effective as water or a new-laid copper wire and shorted out the ground connection, releasing the go-switch. The water trail acted as a substitute for turning on the juice. But don't you feel bad, Mrs. Hannah. This is the one time a practical joke did some good. Now we know. Now we can correct the fault. When the capsule comes in we'll have the proof of what I say—a line of scorched metal marking the last path of an unwanted astronaut."

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INSPECTOR "HANDSOME" WEST



HAIR OF HIS HEAD

*She had been beautiful—until her head
was bashed in. Who had killed the sleep-
ing girl? That was strictly my business.*

by JOHN CREASEY



THE WOMAN slept with one arm gleaming softly in the light which came from the street lamp outside. The house was silent. No one moved in the street and only the one light glowed.

The woman stirred.

A faint sound came from the passage outside; another followed. In the gloom, the handle of the door turned silently. The door opened with a faint squeak.

A man appeared on the threshold. He took two short slow steps into the room, and paused,

smoothing down his hair with a nervous gesture.

The woman in bed stirred again.

The bed was against one wall, and the woman's face was turned towards the window. The man could see her long, dark hair and could also see that she was young.

He crept nearer, one hand outstretched, the other by his side. In that hand was a hammer. The steel head gleamed in the faint light.

He drew closer, until he could see the woman's face. A single

diamond glinted in a ring on her engagement finger.

The woman lay still. The man stood her—his face set and hard, lips slightly parted.

The hammer fell.

The woman's body moved, as if convulsed. A harsh, sobbing sound escaped the man's lips. He struck again and again.

The man averted his eyes from the face of the woman he had killed. He clawed at her hand, pulling the ring off.

Then he went to her dressing table and pried open a jewel box. He took out pendants, brooches and a small necklace, wrapped them in a handkerchief and slipped them into his pocket.

Next, he opened a handbag and took out the bank notes, leaving the loose silver.

He searched the dressing table and the wardrobe until he found a cash box. Using a screwdriver, he forced it open.

A thick wad of bank notes lay there, held together with a rubber band.

He pocketed these, and crept away.

CHIEF INSPECTOR "Handsome"
West of New Scotland Yard pulled up in his car outside Greywings, Lambert Road, Wimbledon, and looked at the house.

West got out and approached the front door on foot. It was a red brick house, in mock-Tudor style,

with a long, trim lawn. The flower borders on either side were gay with color. A police constable stood on the porch.

"Good morning, sir."

"Morning. Is Sergeant Sloan inside?"

"Yes sir."

"Thanks." West went in.

The policeman reflected that for once, a nickname was justified. West ought to be a movie star with that face and that wavy, corn-colored hair.

West hurried up the wide stairs. Another constable stood by an open door on the landing. Inside, five men were working, and the woman still lay on the bed.

A man took a flashlight photograph of the wardrobe, and said: "That's the lot."

Two others were brushing over the articles on the dressing table with grey dusting powder, in search of fingerprints. Another looked up from the rifled cash box which he was examining.

"Hello, Bill," said Roger West. "What have you got?"

Sergeant Sloan grunted, "Can't find a thing to help. He wore gloves—"

"He?"

"Well, the killer did, and this isn't a woman's job," said Sloan. "He wore gloves or adhesive plaster and hasn't left a trace. There are only two sets of prints in the room—the woman's and the maid's. The maid's at home, sick."

Has been for several days. The woman—”

“What's her name?”

“Randall. Lillian Randall. She was going to be married next month. Her fiance's supposed to be abroad—I've made a note to have that checked. There's a letter from him, postmarked Rome, which only arrived yesterday. He's on a government mission, so we can find out whether he's still there easily enough.”

“Where did you get all this information from?”

“The daily woman, Mrs. Clegg. She's in the kitchen, brewing gallons of tea and fainting in between each cup. Usually Miss Randall and her maid are here night and day, but when the maid went sick Miss Randall sent her home—the maid lives quite near.”

“Any idea what time it happened?”

“Old Renny, the surgeon, is here. He says it was some time between twelve and three. The hammer's there,” Sloan pointed to a heavy coal hammer, lying on a piece of brown paper.

Sloan went on: “Mrs. Clegg took one look and said it's the one she uses for coal. Then she fainted.”

“How did the killer get in?”

“By a downstairs window, at the back. It had been forced. Amateur job.”

“Any idea what's missing?”

“Jewels and money.” Sloan

pointed to the woman's hand. “See that scratch on her engagement finger? That's where he tore it off.”

“We'll be able to pick up a description of some of the jewels and maybe numbers of some of the missing bank notes,” said West. “We aren't so clueless as you think, Bill! There's plenty of time yet. I—what's that?”

West was staring at the hammer. He took a pair of tweezers from his pocket.

“This has been photographed, I take it?”

“Yes. Everything has.”

“Good.” West took something between the tweezers and stood up with it. It was a grey hair about two inches long.

“The sun caught it,” he explained. “Seen any more of these about?”

“No, I can't say I have. That's not a woman's hair, either.”

“No, probably not. Let's have another look around.”

They found four more grey hairs, all about the same length. There was nothing else to give them any help.

The body was taken away in a police ambulance and West drove Sloan to Scotland Yard.

In his office several messages were waiting. The dead woman's fiance was still in Rome; the maid's story, as well as Mrs. Clegg's had been checked and found accurate.

The dead woman's solicitor was

anxious to speak to West, who put through a call at once.

"Ah, Inspector!" said the solicitor. "I've been wanting to talk to you. This dreadful business. And so tragic in many ways. Miss Randall was preparing a will. She was quite wealthy, you know, quite wealthy. And I always told her she must make one. But—"

"So there's no will?" West said.

"No, no. If only—"

"Who inherits?"

"Well—over the telephone—well, perhaps it will do no harm. There are four relatives: three cousins and an uncle, yes, all men. The three cousins are on her mother's side, the uncle on the father's. The uncle gets half, the cousin's share the other half. That is controlled by the poor child's father's will. He was very careful, very—"

"I'd like you to send me a note of the names and addresses of all four, please," said West. "As soon as you can."

West rang off. "Let's go along to the lab, Bill."

In the laboratory the chief inspector took out a tiny envelope containing the five hairs and shook them on to a piece of stiff white paper. Then he adjusted the double-view microscope so that both he and Sloan could see.

Carefully, West placed one of the hairs on a glass slide and put it into position.

The hair looked thick and

coarse, like long grass, with little ridges. The root was swollen and bulb-like; the other end was clean cut.

"He's had a haircut recently," mused Roger West. "Now, wait a minute."

West took one of the other hairs, and using a tiny razor-sharp knife, cut one hair slantwise, so that a good section showed. He placed both pieces on the slide.

"See that!" Sloan exclaimed. "The pigmentary cells are black."

"Jet black," agreed West. "That means our man's in the greying process, not old. It puts him at middle age. There's no set rule, but not many men of less than forty are as solidly grey as those hairs suggest. Yet our man's solidly grey, or there'd have been some dark hairs as well as these." The inspector paused a moment.

"Where are we?" West went on. "Age between thirty-five and forty-five, say, and he's just had a haircut. Let's have a look at the roots."

West put another hair on the slide, and now there were three roots, close together. "Hmm. Not smooth, are they? They look it to the naked eye, but under the lens they're rough and look almost like tiny balls of sand. We're getting on, because that makes our boy fat."

"Fat?" echoed Sloan.

"When human head hairs get rough-rooted, like these, it means

that the owner perspires pretty freely. Fat men are more likely to sweat than thin ones."

"Good Lord!"

"And don't forget that perspiration is absorbed by the hair pretty easily, where it grows thickly. In thin spots, the perspiration has a more pronounced effect on the roots—just like this."

Sloan paused, and pointed at the slide. "And as these hairs came out so freely it suggest that they came from near a thin spot. They're too long for the nape of the neck or the temples, so they probably came from the edges of a bald patch."

Sloan drew back from the microscope.

"Roger, I knew you were good, but not so good. Damn it, we've a picture of the man. On the plump side, thirty-five to forty-five, with dark hair turning grey pretty fast, and with a bald spot."

"Plus a recent hair-cut," said West. "Now if one of the cousins or the uncle measures up, we should be able to do some quick work. If they *all* measure up—"

"We have to have some luck," said Sloan. "Shall I send for the lawyer?"

"His list of the names and addresses will soon be here," said West. "Let's wait for it."

The list arrived an hour later. Sloan was in West's office and grabbed the envelope.

"Your man's good," Sloan said.

"Age, appearance and general data about each one, almost as complete as a dossier. And—" Sloan could not hide his excitement. "The three cousins are all in the early twenties. "The uncle is forty-one."

"Let's go and see him," said Roger West.

Mr. Arthur Randall smoothed down his greying hair, and his hand strayed for a moment over the bald patch on top. He was a big man, with heavy, fleshy jowls and flabby cheeks, and his waistcoat stretched tightly over his considerable paunch.

He lived in a flat in a service block, near the heart of London. Everything about the flat was expensive, and Randall, who lived alone, was polite and apparently anxious to help.

"Yes. I've just heard, just heard, Inspector. Dreadful, dreadful business. Poor Lilian! I understand from the solicitor that her valuables were stolen. You're not safe these days. There are so many violent criminals about."

"We need help in this case, Mr. Randall," said West. "And we particularly need yours."

Randall looked startled. "Of course. Anything—anything I can do, Inspector?"

"Thanks!" West was hearty. "It's really quite a small thing, but it matters a great deal. We'd like a hair of your head."

Randall said, "What?"

"Just a hair of your head," said West.

West leaned forward quickly and plucked a hair off the shoulder of Randall's dark coat. To the naked eye it looked identical with those they had examined.

"That'll do, I think. Perhaps you'll come with us to Scotland Yard, while we are examining it."

"Come with you? Are you suggesting—?"

West said mildly: "We're just checking, Mr. Randall. You see, a grey hair about this length was found on the hammer with which your niece was killed. Hairs are remarkable things. They tell you so much if you know what to look for. And they're like fingerprints —no two heads of hair are exactly the same. So—"

Randall cried: "It's an outrage. I won't come!"

"I thought you wanted to help," said West. "But stay here, Mr. Randall. I don't mind."

In the street Inspector Roger West said: "Not much doubt about this, Bill. You take one end

of the street, I'll take the other. If he doesn't come out within twenty minutes, carrying a suitcase and heading for a taxi, I'll be as surprised as if that hair doesn't tally with the others."

Randall appeared in exactly twelve minutes. He carried two suitcases from the block of apartment houses to a taxi, pulled up outside. He was inside the taxi when Sloan reached him from one side and Roger West from the other.

"Nice of you to give us a lift," Sloan said to Randall. "Where were you going? On a little holiday? Do you mind if we look in your suitcase?"

Randall didn't speak.

The jewels and the money were tucked in the bottom of one of the cases.

The hairs from Arthur Randall's head were identical with those found in his niece's room.

Both West and Sloan were at Wandsworth Jail, two months later, when Arthur Randall went for his last walk.



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*It was such a little thing to worry about.
A little paid-in-advance thing—Murder.*

by ROBERT HOSKINS



KILL HIM FOR ME

JOHN CASE stood at the back of the bar, eyes narrowed against the dimness. The spotlight was shrinking on the dime-sized stage as the stripper went into the final

stages of her act. A half-hearted flutter of applause rose from the audience and the house lights went up.

Case returned his attention to the man at his side.

"How old are you?" the man asked.

"Thirty-two."

"Weigh about one-eighty?"

"I eat well."

"At your prices, you should. You look a little bit too well fed."

"Excuse me for living."

"I don't know," the man said, dubiously. "You come well recommended, but—"

"If something's bothering you, forget the deal." Case crushed his cigarette in an overflowing bowl. "Find another boy. All you owe me so far is expenses."

The other laughed nervously. "It's not the money. I told Harris he could name his own price. It's just that—well, this thing has to go right. I can't afford any slip-ups."

The argument was familiar. "Look," said Case, "you want your TV fixed, you go to a TV expert, right? And if your car goes on the fritz, you go to a mechanic. Now you've come to me. I'm an expert, too, just like those other guys. I know my business."

"Oh, I'm sold. I suppose I'm just trying to talk myself out of going through with it. But it's too late, for that, isn't it?"

Case refused to answer. After a moment, the other continued.

"His name is Mackley, Edward Mackley. His address is in the book. Now, about the money—"

"You take care of that with Harris."

"Fine. And the method?"

"I said I'm the expert."

"Okay. But don't take too long. By tomorrow, if possible."

"Tomorrow," he agreed dryly, as though discussing a simple business luncheon rather than the death of a living man.

CASE moved away from the bar, threading through a group of new arrivals. He was conscious that the other man's eyes rested on his back and his skin crawled with the sensation. A sudden wave of revulsion for the other rose in his stomach. He leaned against the wall for a moment, hands clenching and unclenching, perspiration beaded on his forehead. He looked back just in time to see the man self consciously turn away.

A woman bumped into him from the rear, her purse dropping to the floor.

"Oops!" She laughed. "Clumsy me."

He considered her appearance as she waited for him to pick up the purse: the over-abundant makeup, the too-tightly restrained contours of the body. Even so, there was a certain musky attraction that set his blood to tingling.

But this was no time for a woman. Tomorrow night, after the business at hand was finished and his sexual excitement had reached an emotional peak. But not tonight. He pushed through the imitation-leather door while behind him the woman stared indignantly, hands on her hips.

"Well, I like that!" she said to no one in particular. Then she bent and retrieved the purse and turned to survey the other prospects in the bar. After a moment she moved to the stool Case had just vacated.

Outside, Case breathed in appreciatively the night air of the city. Despite its stinks from factories and automobiles, it was still sweet and fresh after the closeness of the bar.

Such a place had an aura all its own, compounded by the hates and jealousies of the second-rate men and women who moved through the inside murkiness, seeking a goal that they could not describe and that could never be found unless they moved into the open world.

He walked slowly along the city streets, a man lost among the thousands hurrying some place and the other thousands with no place in particular to go. The city was strange to him; the chances were strong that he would never see it again. But even in its strangeness, it was familiar, a way of life that was the same in all cities, no matter how large or small.

He neared a phone booth and stepped in to look up Mackley's address. A few moments later his wandering carried him by an auto rental agency. Going in, he paid a fifty dollar deposit and walked out with the keys to a new Ford.

The cover-allied attendant on night duty took him into the garage and gave him his pick of the dozen models sitting there. He chose a dull blue sedan and asked directions to the north side of the city. A moment later the sedan

rolled over a railroad bridge, heading in the direction of his goal.

Traffic was heavy, most of it moving with him, surging suddenly with the closing of the late evening stores.

He came to a Y fork in the road, asked directions of a teenager lounging outside a small grocery, and turned left. The major portion of the traffic took the other fork; by the time the outskirts were dwindling behind him, he had the highway to himself.

Mackley's house was in a new development five miles north of the city, one of the thirty-to-forty thousand dollar models so popular with the new generation of rising young professionals.

The doors to a two-stall garage stood open; one space was occupied by a Volkswagen. The other was empty. Lights were burning brightly behind the closed drapes of the picture window, while a single glow shone dimly through frosted glass upstairs.

Case turned around at the end of the block and drove by the house once more, slowly. Then he headed the car back to the city.

Just past the Y fork, he pulled into a small shopping plaza and parked by a phone booth. He dropped a dime into the slot and dialed. A moment later a man's voice spoke the single word, "Yes?"

"Case."



"How did it go?"

"All arranged for tomorrow."

"Anything you need?"

"Information."

A click in the receiver told him that the connection was broken, but he was satisfied. A sudden stirring in his stomach reminded him that he had not eaten since noon. He headed the car into the city again until he reached a drive-in.

An hour later he climbed behind the wheel once more and returned the car to the rental agency.

The desk clerk was effusively jovial as he came back to the hotel. "Ah, Mr. Case. Enjoying our city?"

Case shrugged. "It's a city," he admitted.

"And we're proud of it!"

"Any messages?" asked Case, as he accepted his key.

The clerk snapped his fingers. "Yes. A messenger brought this in, about an hour ago."

He handed over a large manila envelope, thin but stiff from its contents. Case took it and went up to his room.

There, for the first time that evening, he relaxed totally, stripping off clothes and tossing them in the general direction of the closet. He fluffed up the pillow and lay down with the envelope. His thumb lifted the flap and he withdrew the contents, a thin sheaf of paper with an eight-by-ten photo paper-clipped to the top of the stack.

It was a stock publicity shot: the subject was receiving an award at a banquet. A banner, just barely visible behind him, showed the name of the organization but it had been clipped into illegibility by the blowup, leaving only the head and shoulders of the subject.

Case studied the photo for several moments until every visible detail of the man's face was sharp in his mind. Then he set it down and turned to the accompanying papers. There was a complete credit report on Mackley, dated two years earlier, on the letter-head of a city protective bureau.

There were five pages in all, detailing the habits and preferences of one thirty-seven-year-old-

married man, the father of three living children, complete to the brand and price of cigarettes that he smoked, the cars he owned, the amount outstanding on the mortgage of his house.

There was even a contents list of the small but well-chosen portfolio of growth stocks, down to the number of shares of each and the then-current market quotations.

By the time he finished the report, Mackley had been fleshed out, and had taken on the personal coloring of his individualness. The fact that he was a regularly attending church member, and the large number of service organizations in which he held active membership, all served to turn cold print into a living human being.

Mackley was a lawyer, on loan from one of the city's oldest and most staid firms to the investigative staff of the special prosecutor assigned by the Governor to clean up a corruption that was becoming so bad that the whole state was taking on the taint of it. And that was not good.

Case decided that the finish of this contract would see his immediate disappearance, rather than the usual celebration of a job brought to a satisfactory climax.

He dropped the report and folded his hands behind his head. He stared up at the ceiling, his thoughts working on the most likely method, considering the

many employed on past assignments. It would be easy to get to Mackley at almost any time of day, since he moved almost constantly in public places.

But instinct avoided public places for this one. It had to be some place quiet, some place where the body wouldn't be discovered for the maximum number of minutes. He had performed at all hours of day and night in all manner of places, both public and private.

After a while, each job had taken on a flavor that decided in advance the manner of its execution.

Such a flavor existed here; he had only to let his experienced palate discover it.

Morning found him with the answer to his problem. He rose and dressed quickly, hurrying through his toilet while he waited for breakfast to come up from room service.

After the waiter poured the coffee and left, he brought his suitcase from the closet, opening it on the bed.

The miniature arsenal inside was complete in intended destructiveness. Case eschewed the more esoteric methods of death, placing his faith instead in the more proven gun and knife. A Russian Army sniper rifle, broken down into its component parts, occupied one side of the case proper while three handguns, covering the

range of calibre from .22 to .357 Magnum, were clipped securely into spring clasps.

The lid held half a dozen knives, both folding and solid backed, the latter in their sheaths. All were held down by elastic bands. He selected a springless switchblade for compactness and tested the action. Satisfied, he slipped it into his jacket pocket, then sat down to enjoy his breakfast.

By the time the coffee was finished, it was nearly ten. He wiped his mouth on the napkin, then took his raincoat from the closet. Carrying the suitcase, he left the hotel, leaving his key at the desk.

He walked through the rain to the main street of the city, then down a side street until he reached the elderly bulk of a now-little used railroad station. He checked the bag in a coin locker, then returned to the corner.

A university bus approached shortly. He boarded it, staying with it until the city had been completely traversed, getting off the stop before the university library.

The report had mentioned Mackley's habit of spending one morning a week researching material for articles that appeared regularly in the law journals, a habit of ten years' standing that nothing was permitted to interrupt. It was pure luck that this happened to be the day, but Case was

not one to overlook natural blessings.

He spotted the unmistakeable form of the lawyer getting out of a car fifty feet ahead. He pulled a soft tweed hat from his pocket and donned it, then followed the other up the steps. Inside, Case paused by a shelf of new releases while he watched the direction taken by the other.

Luck was still with him. Mackley went down a staircase, rather than up into the open stacks. Case gave him five minutes, then casually duplicated his route.

A short corridor halfway down made a sharp bend to the left; at the foot of the next flight was the Men's room. A door opposite said *Janitor*; the frosted glass was dark. Case followed the bend and found himself suddenly in a room lined with stacks that were filled with old periodicals.

The lawyer was at a short table, notebook open and half a dozen reference works piled before him. He looked up idly as Case approached.

"Mr. Mackley?"

"Yes. What can—Uh!"

The razor-edged knife slid easily through the heavy layers of clothing and up under the rib cage, not stopping until the hilt was tight against the cloth. Case gave the blade a sudden twist, then withdrew it as quickly as it had entered.

Mackley stared down at the

spreading red stain on his side, then up at the man who had just killed him. His only expression was one of mild surprise. He opened his mouth to say something and blood bubbled forth. He shook his head once, as though still not believing what had happened, then slumped silently forward.

Case rolled his head over and peeled back the eyelids. Satisfied that his job was done, he retraced his steps along the corridor, turning into the men's room. He wiped the hilt of the knife and dropped it into the waste basket, then went upstairs and walked slowly through the main reading room, then out and down the steps.

From now on each movement was calculated as a risk, but he was gambling from his knowledge of libraries that at least a quarter of an hour would pass before the body was discovered. He crossed to the opposite side of the street and caught the same bus back to town.

Removing his hat, he turned into a large variety store and went to the phone booths in the back. The store was crowded with shoppers, despite the rain. He went into the first booth, placed the hat on the shelf, and thumbed through the directory. Then he stepped out and into the third booth, where he dialed the same number as the evening before. The same voice answered.

"Yes?"

"It's done."

"Already? Fast work. The pickup isn't ready."

"Why not? I don't have any time to waste."

"Give me an hour." And again the conversation was finished.

Case went to the lunch counter and ordered coffee, then picked up an abandoned paper. He leafed quickly through the main sections, stopping only for a thorough reading of the comics and then the sports.

After that, he returned to the train station, where he checked the scheduled departure times of the eastbound trains.

He frequently checked his watch as he wandered around the terminal. He stopped at the newsstand and bought a pair of paperback mysteries, stuffing them into his pocket. Finally, the requested hour exhausted, he went into the men's room.

Two men were at the urinals. Case washed his hands until one left, then he turned to the other.

"What are you doing in town, Harry?"

"Just visitin', Case," said the other. He was a middle-aged man best described as a nondescript. "I've been lookin' in on my old friend, Lou Harris."

"You have the pickup?"

"Yeah, I have it." He pulled a long envelope from his pocket and balanced it in the palm of his

hand. "Quite a price—seven and a half long ones."

"If I'd known the party, the price would have been twenty-five."

"That's the trouble with you, Case, you're too greedy. Any of the boys would've been glad to handle it for three."

"If Harris wanted the other boys, he'd have called them."

"Yeah, he would have, I guess. Of course, you ain't got the only contract in town."

"Oh?" It was a breach of bad manners to talk about a contract not yet executed. "Good for you. Now let's have the cash. I'm in a hurry to get out of here."

"That's funny," said Harry. "So am I." He slipped the envelope back into his pocket.

"What's the idea?" asked Case, suspiciously.

"It's like I told you. You're too greedy. But you ain't the only one. Harris, he's kind of on the look-out for the long ones himself.

Doesn't too much ever get past him."

"Get to the point, Harry."

"You've been crossed, Case."

"What?"

"That's the way it is. Harris put out your contract. He isn't about to give you seven and a half when somebody else'll take care of you for three."

Case's tongue darted across suddenly dry lips. "Who—who's got my contract, Harry?"

"Who else?" He shrugged and brought the gun from his pocket. It spoke twice, a barely audible *plop* under the silencer. Case felt a hammer slam against his chest with each report.

His hand went to his shirt and came away sticky. He looked at it, still surprised, not believing it was happening to him. Then he crumpled slowly to the floor.

His last conscious thought was the memory of Mackley's face as the knife went in. He wondered if his own expression was the same.



A NEW COMPLETE MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL NEXT MONTH



Making the Murder Scene

by
ED LACY

Money... love... men, these had been her life. Which of her lovers had kissed—and killed?

IT BEGAN LIFE a great day: sun out with a mild breeze coming in from the sound, a cold six-pack under the boat seat, soft jazz on the transistor in my shirt pocket and the fish biting like crazy.

Then, on the one o'clock radio

news, I heard about Mable Andrews' murder in Hampton.

Rowing ashore fast, I tossed my hump back porgies at a startled tourist using a handline from the dock. In the Harbor city hall, which is also our post office, fire

house and police station, Chief Kolchiniski asked, "Got your tours mixed up, Jake? You're on the night—"

"Frank, I want a few days' vacation."

"Come on, Jake. In July? With our five man force, no vacations until after Labor Day and the summer tourists have gone."

"Frank, I want a few days off. Now!"

I'm fifty-four years old, with over thirty years on the Harbor force. Frank had only put in twenty-one years, always felt kind of bad about my being passed over for the gold, chief's badge. Drumming on his battered desk with stubby fingers, he asked, "Going to Hampton, Jake?"

I nodded.

"Listen, keep out of it. He's too important, too big for you to tangle with. Plus, you ought to mind your business for another reason: you're a first rate cop, Jake, but—when it comes to Wallace Andrews you have a blind spot. You remember what happened the last time, so—"

"Frank, am I on vacation?"

He sighed. "Okay. Be careful, Jake."

I drove the twenty-three miles to Hampton in eighteen minutes. When I walked into their modern, air conditioned police station, the desk man said, "Hey, I was just on the phone to Chief Kolchiniski. How was the fishing, Jake?"

"Fine. Roberts busy?"

"Trolling for blues myself, last night. Never saw fish biting so good. Go right in."

In addition to being the county seat, Hampton is surrounded by wealthy estates and Chief Roberts reflected their streamlined police force. Everything about him was—well, trim. A lean, rangy guy in a pressed uniform, the brushed silver and brown hair above a rugged and handsome face. He'd been a NYC police inspector before taking this job.

Shaking my hand, he pointed toward a chair and shut the door. Then Roberts stared at me from behind his desk for a moment. "I trust you haven't any ideas of making the murder scene, Jake."

"That's exactly why I'm here, to help you."

"As I told the State Troopers, we don't need any outside help, Jake. Your police power doesn't extend beyond the Harbor village. I don't like anybody walking around Hampton with a shoulder gun under his windbreaker."

"Roberts, legally I'm a peace officer with the right to carry a gun any place in the state. I won't get in your way. I want to help. You going to give me the facts on her killing or do I have to start digging on my own?"

His hard gray eyes studied me for a moment longer. "Jake, some straight talk. I can toss your back-side out of Hampton, if I want to,

even into a cell. Your car's in the *no parking* area in front of my police station right this second. In short, become a nuisance and I can turn real nasty. Is that clear?"

"Very clear. You think I'm a hick cop who—"

"On the contrary, I know you're a veteran and capable police officer. But I also know you have a 'thing' going on Wallace Andrews. I'm too busy to have your personal feelings get in my way, or for you to make a fool of yourself."

"I'm too old to act the fool, Roberts." He smiled. I knew well what he was thinking: the bit about there's no fool like an old fool.

I wanted to wipe the grin from his lean face with my fist. But I asked calmly, "What's the dope on her killing, Chief?"

Roberts leaned back in his fancy, leather chair. "Two hours ago, shortly after noon, Mrs. Andrews was found dead in her boat house. She was badly beaten, strangled with her bikini halter. The medical examiner has the corpse now. Time of death: noon. She was also criminally attacked, if that's possible in her case. We—"

"Cut that damn gossip garbage!" I shouted.

"You want the facts, then face it. Mable Andrews was a nymphomaniac, as you obviously know."

I got to my feet. "Roberts, I told you to stop that garbage! Mable was a fine woman, lovely, warm and friendly."



He said softly, "Sit down, Jake, if you want to help. Were you still seeing her?"

I slumped in the chair and nodded, trying to hold on to my nerves.

"When did you see her last?"

"Two weeks ago, before she went to New York City."

"And before that?"

"We met once a week in a deserted cove, outside the Harbor."

Roberts shook his head. "Jake, you're almost twice her age. Wallace Andrews found you two together the year before last, beat you up so badly you were hospitalized; used his influence to see you weren't made Harbor police chief. Was she worth all that? Corny as it may sound, I'm asking man to man."

"Roberts, look at me, a big man running to lard in my old age, a widower for the past eight years. Even in my younger days I was just a burly slob. Okay, I stop

Mable Andrews for passing a red light in the Harbor and . . . Can you imagine what it means—meant for a guy like me having a beautiful and intelligent young woman interested in me?"

"But you must have heard about her being a nympho, her other lovers?"

"That was Mable's business. All I know is she gave me rare moments of intense happiness. Now, let's skip my personal life and get to her murder. I happen to know Mable hated Wallace's guts, was about to dump him."

"And marry you?"

"Stop it. Mable and I were friends. Here's something you don't know: Mable wanted to go to bat for me, to become Harbor police chief, even though Wallace threatened to make our affair public. Of course I wouldn't let her do it."

"She told you she was going to leave Wallace?"

"Yes. She went to New York to see about a divorce, giving Wallace a strong murder motive. You must know their story, even though it was before you came to Hampton. When they married nine years ago, Mable was seventeen and at loose ends because her folks had been killed in a plane crash. Wallace was the great Ivy League hero, the football star who went on to become Olympic heavyweight boxing champ. The sports pages were full of his offers to turn pro and his line

about 'no gentleman ever becomes a professional athlete.'

"The Andrews were old line society, but they never recovered from the '29 stock market crash. It was Mable's money which started Andrews Industries, Inc. She still held the purse strings, so a divorce would have left Wallace broke. Not poor the way you and I can get, but stony by his standards. With Mable dead and no kids, he'll come into her millions."

"Did she tell you why she was thinking of divorcing him?"

"Roberts, maybe Mable was a— a nympho, but she was also a clever woman, with a good mind of her own. She was fed up with his arrogance, his drinking, the beatings and his stupid, snob ideas. You know how Mable was interested in the conditions of the migratory workers around here, was responsible for the big stink about the lousy shacks they live in."

"She set up this new day care center for their kids. She put fifty grand into that and Wallace blew a fuse. With her millions, fifty thousand dollars may be only pin money, but Wallace raised hell. He beat her and she'd had it. Damn, when I saw her puffed eye, I could have killed him!"

This heavy silence filled the office; I heard the faint sound of the air conditioner loudly. "As a fellow police officer," Roberts said, "I'd advise you to stop talking about killing Wallace. In fact, you're

damn lucky you don't have an out-board, Jake."

"What's that mean?"

"Mr. Andrews has an alibi, so we've been checking on Mrs. Andrews' lovers. You claim she was a great pal. But suppose she had wanted to end the affair? That would give you a motive. However, I've already checked you out. Lot of folks saw you fishing at eleven A.M. The Harbor is about twenty-two miles away, by water; it would be impossible for you to row that far and back within an hour. So far, most of her other bedmates are in the clear, too. We're—"

"What's Wallace's alibi?"

"He was skin diving with three other men here in the bay, at the time of her death."

"That's an alibi? He could have easily swam in and killed her!"

Roberts sighed. "His alibi is thin, but holds. Seems they were testing a new walkie-talkie gimmick fitted into their face masks. Mr. Andrews is interested in marketing the device. They were swimming about one thousand yards out, from a cabin cruiser one of the men had anchored off Clam Point buoy, testing the device from eleven to twelve forty-five.

They were talking to each other all the time, underwater, in fact Wallace was the life of the party with some dirty jokes. They're positive about the time, their air tanks have a two-hour underwater maximum time limit."

"Roberts, are you buying that bunk? Wallace could have easily swam from Clam Point to the boat house and back in under twenty minutes!"

"Easy, Jake. I'm not buying anything. The point is, this walkie-talkie only has a range of two hundred yards, tops. I have three men who swear Wallace was joking with them at least eight hundred yards from the boat house, at the time of the murder. I've checked the range. One of the men is an electronics engineer, assured me it can't broadcast more than two hundred yards underwater."

"Where's Wallace now?"

"Here, in the station house. I'm holding him, until I can have a lab also check the walkie-talkie, as a material witness."

"And he's standing still for that, with all his influence? Didn't have a lawyer spring him?"

Roberts scowled. "Mr. Andrews has been most cooperative, said he understood my position and all that jazz. Hell, Jake, I immediately had him pegged as the number one murder suspect myself and he was within eight hundred yards of the killing. He's shook up about his wife's death. Like I said, his alibi is thin, but he isn't worried over that."

There was another silence. I listened to the hum of the air conditioner for a moment, then got to my feet. "Thanks, Roberts. I'll just nose around."

"Remember, take it slow. We're busy checking out all servants, past and present."

"Who found the body?"

"The cook. Being it's Thursday, the rest of the household staff is off. The cook started looking for Mrs. Andrews to ask if she wanted lunch. Mrs. Andrews had been in the boat house all morning, sewing a new jib sail for her dinghy. She was a big dinghy racer. Look, Jake, do us both a favor. Go back to the Harbor."

"I might do that. See you."

I called Dick Cohen from a phone booth, although I was sure he was still fishing—I'd seen him in his outboard a few hours ago. There wasn't any answer and I drove back to the Harbor, finally located the boy in the Paradise Soda Shop. Dick's a high school senior and a ham radio operator who knows all about electronics.

Twenty minutes later I was speeding back to Hampton. Bargaining into Roberts' office I told him, "Wallace's alibi isn't worth a damn! I've checked with a radio nut in the Harbor. Although he never heard of this underwater walkie-talkie, he's certain that if it has a broadcasting range of two hundred yards underwater, it would have at least the same range as most walkie-talkies *out* of water and even the toy ones can send for one thousand yards or more!"

"Forget it," Roberts said, looking up from his phone.

"Forget it? Don't you see, if Wallace was in the boat house, *out* of water, he could still be talking to his skin diving buddies, one thousand yards away! They'd have no real idea where he was. Underwater you can't see for more than a dozen yards!"

Holding up a manicured hand for silence, Roberts said into the phone, "Keep checking, Artie, every migratory shack, bring in any man or woman with scratches. Find out if anybody has left the farms today, too."

Hanging up, he told me, "Doors are made to knock on, Jake. We've got a break: Medical Examiner found skin under Mable Andrews' nails. Negro skin. Like you said, she was interested in the potato pickers."

"Roberts, listen to me, I was born in the Harbor. We've always had migratory workers around here in summer and fall. Sure, they may get juiced now and then and there's a fight. Or we collar them for speeding. I can recall one case of petty theft, too. But in the last twenty-five years I never heard of a potato picker involved in a major crime!"

"Jake, you're so hooked on getting Wallace it's pitiful. You're forgetting the kind of woman Mable Andrews was. Maybe she took a personal interest in one of the men. In any event the facts are she put up a fight and we've found the skin under her nails."

"Did you release Wallace?"

"Of course. But he isn't leaving town. He's making the funeral arrangements. Jake, I've over two hundred farm workers to check on, so give me a break and blow."

Standing on the curb, blinking at the sun, my head ached. I hadn't eaten since seven. After a hamburger, pie and coffee, I felt a little better.

I went through back copies of the Hampton Press, bought a paper with a snap of Wallace Andrews holding a ten-pound fluke he'd speared, looking the All-American in swim trunks, a confident smile on his strong face.

Driving back to the Harbor, I stopped to chat with Doc Haff, an old friend. I felt even better: as I knew from Mable, in the summer Wallace only went to his New York offices on Mondays and Fridays. What Doc Haff told me at least didn't make my search impossible —like having to cover all of Harlem, say.

I drove out to Buster Turner's grocery and bar, between the Harbor and Bridgewater. Turner's a tough, smart operator who came up from Florida as a spud picker twenty-six years ago and stayed. He'd opened this crummy store on a back road, sold groceries to the migratory workers for double what any supermarket charged, knowing the pickers would be too tired or shy to come to town. Until he swung his bar license, he'd boot-

legged and even now, we knew he ran numbers and other gambling.

I had never liked him because he was exploiting the spud pickers worse than the farmers.

His store doesn't look like much, a rambling wooden deal, but he has a \$40,000 ranch house in Bridgewater and both his daughters are in college. Buster knew everything that happened among the spud pickers.

On seeing me he asked, "What do you think I did, now, Jake?" We never had much use for the other.

"I'm after information, Buster, need your help."

"I ain't no stoolie," he grunted.

"Listen, there's been a killing over in Hampton and they think a Negro did it, might even frame some black man or woman. I—"

Buster burst out laughing. "Since when did *you* join the NAACP, Jake?"

"Look, Buster. Never mind the cracks. Right now I need information."

"What kind of info?"

"Did any potato picker die in the last forty eight hours?"

"Not that I heard of. You mean murdered?"

"Not exactly. Did anybody die of natural causes?"

"Nope. They'd have come to me for an undertaker."

"Any of the wino pickers suddenly flashing money, say a hundred bucks or so?"

"Not around here. What you driving at, Jake?"

The estate and tourist boom has cut down the number of farms on the Island to an area about thirty miles long and seven or eight miles wide, near the tip of the Island. A Bill Ash ran a store like Buster's, if smaller, out near the point.

"Buster, can you phone Bill Ash, ask if he's heard of anybody dying or suddenly flashing money?"

"Sure, I can call Bill. What you after, Jake?"

"I want to know if anybody has sold some skin within the past forty eight hours."

He blinked. "*Sold skin?* Jake, have you flipped your skull?"

"Buster, they found colored skin under a murdered woman's nails and the police assume it got there because she was fighting off her killer. I think the murderer put it there. The guy I suspect has a strong motive, plus he was too sure of his weak alibi, acted like he knew the Medical Examiner would find the skin.

"Doc Haff told me it wouldn't hurt too much to run a file over an arm or a leg, pick up enough skin to stuff under finger nails. I figure a wino would be glad to do it for fifty or a hundred bucks."

"That sounds crazy."

"Murder always is. And the joker trying for the perfect killing is a real nut."

Buster made the call, shook his big head as he hung up. "Old Bill

don't know anything. Why you so sure this killer used a potato picker's skin, Jake? He could have gone to the city and bought himself some dead man's skin—in a Harlem morgue."

"Doc Haff said they can tell if skin is more than two days old, even if it was kept on ice. The guy I suspect only goes into the city on Mondays and Fridays. Buster, anybody around here wearing a new bandage? While it wouldn't be much of a wound, it could get infected."

"Jake, picking spuds ain't exactly delicate work; you're always getting scratched. But the money is the angle and I haven't heard of anybody flashing even a small bundle. Still, they might keep a hundred bucks quiet, too. Got enough bad feelings about the pickers now, what with the new day care thing. Now a murder charge and they might start bringing in Puerto Rican pickers, kill my business. Come on, Jake."

I followed Buster out of his store, into a new Caddy roadster he had parked in the rear.

"Where we going?" I asked. It was four o'clock.

"See Doc Dupre. He's a young colored medico just opened an office outside Bridgewater. Mrs. Andrews brought him here to—Hey, I heard she was killed. Is this linked to her?"

I nodded. Buster stared at me, seemed about to say something,

then started his car. "Mable was a good woman."

"Yeah, the best."

Dr. Dupre was a slim, tan man of about thirty, who told me, "No, I haven't had a case of skin infection all week. A few colds, sprained back, virus infection, a kid with German measles. That about covers yesterday and today. No, nothing except an odd case of a teenager who was slugged by a white man yesterday. The young fellow came in to see me last night, have his jaw checked. No broken bones. Also had a baby, with an ear—"

"This teenager was in a fight with a white man?" I cut in.

"Not a fight, really, rather a case of mistaken identity. He said he was walking along this back road when a car stopped. A man got out and knocked him cold. When the boy—"

"Cooled him with a single punch?" I cut in, again.

"Seems so. When the boy came to, the man said he was sorry, that he'd thought the boy was somebody else. He apologized and gave the kid ten dollars."

"Was the lad bruised at all?"

"Not that I recall. At least he didn't complain of anything but a dull pain in his chin."

Buster asked, "Doc, you got the lad's name and address?"

A HALF HOUR later we stopped at a potato farm and were talking to a seventeen-year-old named

George Davis, one of these tall, skinny kids. He said, "I was walking along to get a pail of insect spray, when this car stopped. I didn't pay it no mind. Bam! This big cat runs over and knocks me cold. I never had a chance to get my mitts up.

"Well, when I was able to sit up, he was fussing over me. Said he was sorry as hell, thought I was a guy he'd had some trouble with. Gave me ten bucks, he did."

George was wearing a t-shirt. I pointed to a small bruise on his right forearm. "Did you have that bruise before he hit you, Mr. Davis?" I asked, trying to keep the eagerness out of my voice.

"Naw. I must have hit my arm when I was flattened. Just a little old bruise."

"Did you land on gravel, son?"

"Nope. I had my shoes off, was walking on the grassy side of the road. Had grass stains on the shirt I was wearing then, come to think of it, so I must have fallen on grass."

Buster asked, "How long were you out?"

George grinned, then rubbed his jaw. "Man, you think I timed it? Who knows. Seemed like a year but I guess it was a minute or so. Why are you so interested?"

I pulled out the newspaper snap of Wallace.

"Did you ever see this man before, Mr. Davis?"

"Yeah, that's him. He sure can

wallop. Although he Sunday-punched me. If I'd known he was going to clout me, well, I'm fast with my hands and I—"

"Mr. Davis, I want you to drive to Hampton with us."

"Now look, we pick until six and it ain't five yet. I'm losing time talking to you. What's this—"

"I'll double what you'd make for this hour," Buster said.

"Well—What's this all about? I won't give back the ten bucks; he gave it to me. And I don't want no trouble. You a cop, mister?"

"Yeah. Listen, you won't have to return the money nor will you be in any trouble. I only want you to talk to the Hampton police chief and by tonight I think you'll be a hero, with your picture in the papers all across the country."

"That's the truth," Buster added. "You'll be working with the police. Man, you'll be so famous you might even be on TV! You

know me. I wouldn't give you a bum steer."

As we raced toward Hampton in Buster's smooth Caddy, Davis on the back seat, Buster glanced at me in the windshield mirror.

"Guess they won't pass you over the next time there's an opening for Harbor Police Chief, now, Jake."

I grinned. "I'll be dead by then. Frank's too young and healthy. I wasn't even thinking of the gold badge. I did this for a friend, a very special pal."

My voice began to shake. I'd been so busy busting Wallace, I hadn't thought too much about Mable. Now it hit me hard; I'd never see her again. Never know the joys of us two together. I stuck my head out of the car, let the cool wind hit me.

Buster Turner asked, "Say, is there something in your eyes, Jake? They're wet."

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NIGHTMARE

at

CRESTVIEW TOWERS

by ROBERT COLBY



THREE HAD been three murders at the Crestview Towers over on Franklin in Hollywood before I was brought into the case as an undercover man.

I had been working undercover for years, first with Narcotics, then with Homicide. Consequently, beyond the high brass in the department, it was not known that I was a sergeant of detectives.

The secret plan to adopt an undercover man for permanent and exclusive use in homicide cases developed when the number of unsolved murders on the books began to increase alarmingly. The

usual step-by-step methods of plodding detection had failed miserably in these stubborn cases and a sneaky approach seemed the only answer.

Because, incidentally, I had brought a few killers to justice during my assignment on Narcotics, I had been elected to do the sneaking.

That was more than a year ago and so far my luck had held beautifully. Several complex crimes involving murder had been cleared from the books—and I was still alive. But after close study of the file on the murders at Crestview

*Somewhere in that house of fear lay the
key to a deadly riddle. Could I find the
Crestview killer—before I became his prey?*



Towers I had the uneasy conviction that I was in for serious trouble.

I had faked a couple of foot-loose type jobs which I used as a cover and even my friends were not aware that I was a cop. Since I had a whole bunch of weirdly fascinating true stories to tell, the official silence which surrounded my activities was painfully inhibiting.

During the time of the Crestview murders I was a bachelor—and a good thing too. For my ex-wife could pump dark Kremlin secrets from a Russian wolfhound, despite the language barrier.

The Crestview Towers was an ancient gray-stone structure of seven stories. Formerly pretentious, ornate, it had become a sooty antique with the massive and gloomy lines of the thirties. It had once contained movie stars, producers and leaders of industry, had boasted of doormen, elevator jockeys, a switchboard girl.

But the flunkies had fled with the elite. The lobby, the dusky-dim corridors exuded dismay and neglect. Now the tenants were from the great melting pot of the city, their one distinction an ability to get up the rent.

The three murder victims were all men. The first two had been forcibly ejected from life in the dead of night via high windows. And because there are few varieties of murder more difficult to prove

than high-dive homicide, there was a brief period of official doubt—a conjecture of suicide or accident.

But then, as if the killer had abandoned covert forms of violence in a sudden storm of uncontrollable fury, the third victim had been stabbed twenty-eight times with an ice pick or similar weapon.

Twenty-eight times! You don't have to be crazy to stab someone twenty-eight times, but it sure helps. And this last murder was a clue to the psychotic type we were hunting.

Of the three dead men, only Jack Meyers was a bachelor. He was the first to go, tumbling from a rear window in the sixth floor hallway, his body smashing upon the cement floor of the court below. The hall window was adjacent to his apartment and by leaning far from it you could almost touch the window to his kitchen.

Because this kitchen window had been open, and because Meyers' door key was not found among the effects produced from his pockets, it was presumed that he had forgotten the key and was attempting to enter by the kitchen when he lost balance and fell.

However, the key was not inside his apartment either, and the boys at Homicide smelled something slightly foul in the wind. But the key might have been lost anywhere and Jack Meyers' death could still be an accident.

A shoe salesman, Meyers had

been to a Saturday-night party, returning close to four. An autopsy revealed that he had consumed enough booze to petrify the average drinker; thus an accidental demise was probable. That was the official verdict.

The second victim was Don Rainey, night manager of a nearby hotel. His shift ended at three on the black morning he departed this world from an identical corridor window on the seventh floor. No doubt he had been hurrying home to his wife, Barbara, for she was a type who would make a man want to cover the distance from portal-to-portal with all dispatch.

Even if he had taken wing from his own window there would have been plenty of suspicion down at headquarters. But two guys diving from corridor windows a month apart? Hardly. Further, there was certain evidence that Rainey had been clubbed over the head before he was launched into space, though what medic could be certain after such a fall?

Bernie Hickman, who was stabbed twenty-seven times more than was necessary to kill him, was a musician. He played guitar with a three-piece combo which performed in a small club at the edge of the Sunset Strip. He was also married, but his wife, an aerialist for a traveling circus, was on tour at the time of his murder.

We knew a little about Bernie. He was a pot smoker when he wasn't

taking acid "trips" on the LSD route. He was brought in once for questioning, though they didn't have enough to hold him.

Anyway, he wasn't a pusher—he was a small-fry user who got his supply from "friends." They were such good friends that he could never remember their names.

Bernie came in from the job one night three weeks after the Don Rainey killing. The other two parts of the trio were with him. They sat around his apartment for a time, smoking it up, talking show biz and girl biz. Bernie saw his pals to their car, then went on to an all-night beanery for coffee-and.

When he came home and stepped into the elevator, the killer must have joined him. He never made it to the fourth floor. At least, he never made it alive, since he was being stabbed twenty-eight times enroute.

Someone had reduced that trio to a duo. And not his fellow musicians either. While Bernie was eating his last meal they were involved in a wreck on the Pasadena Freeway. The hospital furnished them with an alibi.

My boss at Homicide, Lieutenant Warren Galloway, tried impossible to find a common denominator in the murder of these three guys. But they were practically strangers. If there was a connection, a thread holding them together, it was invisible.

Since apparently nothing had

been stolen, the obvious motive seemed revenge. To stab a guy twenty-eight times you have to be just a bit peeved at him.

So Homicide was for revenge as the motive, revenge taken by a clever psycho who lived at the Crestview Towers, who probably had killed the three men for a single reason, and who likely would kill again.

Now stir the ingredients cautiously and add a secret dose of Ross Lyon, Detective Sergeant, Homicide. That's me.

What I needed was a gimmick that would bring me in contact with the tenants. I came equipped with a plan on the morning of my arrival at the Crestview, but it depended too much upon the whims of human nature to be a total success.

A much better scheme fell into my lap as Ralph Ellis, the manager, guided me around the building for a look at the drab furnished apartments which were available. He was a pleasant young fellow, a husky open-faced blond who walked with a limp, easing himself along on a thick cane which seemed little more than an elongated toothpick clutched in his meaty paw.

Ellis was talkative. He told me at once that he had taken a spill from his motorcycle and a cast had just been removed from his leg, that he had a third interest in the building and was a reluctant manager.

The job was demanding, he said. And it kept him confined indoors. More than this, he had to cover the building on foot and that was a lot of yardage on a bad leg. He needed about three assistants but couldn't afford one, unless he could find a sucker willing to relieve him occasionally in return for free rent.

"If that's a serious offer," I said, "you've just found your sucker."

He smiled wryly. "Man, you don't know what you're saying," he remarked. "It's a job for a zoo keeper. Ever had any experience at this sort of work?"

"I learn quickly."

"Got a thick skin?"

"I'm an alligator."

"And a tin ear? You'll need a tin ear, that's for sure. Place like this you get all kinds. The chronic complainers, the wheedlers for more of this and less of that, the old fudgies who're ready to call cop if they hear a belch after sunset—you got to tune them all out."

"I'll turn down my hearing aid."

He sighed, shifted more weight to the cane. "These days you can't keep the good tenants. The creeps scare them off. I got two partners who won't let me clean this place up, give it a new face, toss out the bums and redecorate. Damn tightwads!"

For a moment he gazed at me steadily, solemnly. Then he smiled. "All right, we'll give each other a try. Decide which cell you're gonna take?"

"I like that one on Seven," I answered. I liked it because it was across the hall from 7B. I had been tipped that Barbara Rainey lived in 7B and I thought if I got to know her she might furnish a clue.

"Okay," Ellis said. "Come down and I'll give you the key. The first week you'll get to know the tenants and the routine. Then you can cover for me on week-ends. That way, you'll have time to make a living. You do have some sort of job, don't you?"

I was ready for that.

"I'm a commercial artist," I said. "Free lance. I do advertising layouts and I work mostly at home."

"Bad for you, good for me," he cracked. "You'll be handy." He turned and limped off. I followed him to the elevator.

The manager's apartment was, typically, on the ground floor. Ralph Ellis introduced me to his wife. She was Chinese—a fragile toy, very shy. She greeted me with oriental grace and vanished.

I settled into a comfortable chair while Ellis searched a rack above his desk, produced the key and gave it to me, along with another to open the lobby door which was locked at night.

"Somewhere I've got a duplicate roster of the tenants and their apartment numbers," Ellis said. "I'll see if I can find it because you ought to know who's who and where."

He hobbled off to another room.

I glanced about. The furnishings

were modern and cheerful, none of that faded junk which depressed the rooms of the habitants. On the end table beside me there was a true detective magazine and a pair of scissors. When I opened the magazine I found a letter-sized square of cardboard inserted before a story entitled: NIGHTMARE AT CRESTVIEW TOWERS. And below this the caption: *Murder stalks the ghostly corridors of the Crestview in search of another victim.*

The square of cardboard contained half a dozen pasted newspaper clippings, a progressive account of the three murders. I was studying these intently when I looked up to see Ellis standing in the center of the room, watching me. Despite his limp and cane, I had not heard him enter.

His face was expressionless but his eyes were narrowed.

"See you're a collector," I said heartily, tapping the cardboard with my finger.

He was holding a sheet of paper which I knew was the roster. He tucked it into his pocket and limped over with his palm extended toward me. I replaced the clippings and passed him the magazine. Without a word he sealed it away in a drawer of his desk. He remained with his back to me for what seemed a long moment before he turned.

He was smiling, though I could see it was a painful effort.

"Sorry," he said. "Didn't mean to be rude. But I'm upset about this

thing, you know?" He sank heavily into a chair and combed through his long blond hair with nervous fingers.

"Upset is a mild word," he continued. "I can't remember when I've slept—really slept."

"That's easy to believe," I told him.

"It's destroying me," he said. "Not just emotionally, either. We're being wrecked financially. We're more than half empty, and frankly, we've been considering closing down."

He lighted a cigarette. "The police are against it. They need more time and we've agreed to give it to them. After that—" He shrugged. "My partners may sell out to some high-rise builders and they can force me to go along."

I nodded. "You know the tenants better than anyone, I suppose. Got any ideas?"

"There are twenty-three people here. That's how many ideas I got. Any one of them." He exhaled a long plume of smoke. "Of course that's an exaggeration. We have a lot of decrepit old people who've been around since year one. They can hardly lift their arms, let alone a man. Then there are some young office gals, a car-hop, a model—and Mrs. Rainey. I can't very well suspect them."

"What happened to the other widow, the Mrs. Hickman?"

His eyebrows lifted. "How'd you know about her?"

"Her name has been in the news for quite awhile."

He pursed his lips. "That's true. Well, she never came back. Couldn't bear it, they tell me. Sent someone for her stuff—and his." He paused. "Listen, if you're gonna work here, you can expect to be cross-examined by some of the tenants. Tell them nothing. Play dumb and close the subject. The less talk the better. We can't afford to drive them off."

"You can count on me," I said, standing. "On the other hand, you don't mind if I introduce myself around, do you? A little familiarity breeds confidence."

"Go right ahead. Anything you like." He grinned. "I won't lie to you. I advertised. I couldn't get anyone until you came along. So you're a find. Would you believe that?"

"I'd believe it," I told him. He handed me the roster and I went out, wondering why Homicide hadn't learned that Ellis was looking for an assistant, the perfect shoe for my big foot.

I PARKED MY Chevy in the subterranean garage and began to unload a couple of suitcases and some cartons of personal junk I had brought along—enough to make it look good. I stacked these on the self-service elevator and pushed the button for seven, the top.

7C was a one-bedroom apart-

ment facing the street. It had plenty of big windows and the old high ceilings. Also, in the tradition of the "good old days," the rooms were spacious. The stained, dreary furniture was sparse, inadequate for the cavernous rooms.

I unpacked the boxes and spread the symbols of myself around in case I had a visitor or two. I also set up a drawing board and some tools of the commercial artist's trade to simulate my phony line of work.

From the false bottom of a suitcase I removed the two weapons I usually brought along—a .38 revolver, a police special, and a compact rifle in two sections, a high-powered job with a telescopic sight. These were strictly emergency weapons, rarely used but priceless under certain extreme conditions.

I assembled and loaded the rifle, applied the safety lock. Because it would pass as a hunting weapon, I simply stowed it in a corner of the living room closet where it would be quickly available. Since a hand gun is ineffective at long range, a rifle can bring down a criminal who has the advantage of being a distant target.

I slid my revolver out of the shoulder holster and checked it before again concealing it inside the secret compartment of the suitcase. Carrying the gun could give me away. Also I figured the chances were pretty good that I wouldn't be needing it.



How little we know.

I crossed to the door and peered out through the one-way glass peephole—a marvelous invention for spying undetected. I had a clear view of Barbara Rainey's door, the hallway, the elevator. But their vacant faces told me nothing and I was about to turn when the elevator sprang open and a man stepped out briskly, striding toward the Rainey apartment.

He was pretty boy, good looking and well put together, a man in his lower thirties. He wore a light gray flannel suit, complete with charcoal tie and white shirt. He didn't hesitate, so I knew he had been this route before.

He rang the bell, at the same time glancing about nervously as if to see if he was being observed.

She arrived so quickly, she might have been waiting just inside the door. There was something furtive about the way she let him in, opening just enough to let him pass, closing the door swiftly, soundlessly.

I caught only one delicious peek at her, but it gave me an appetite for more. Her yellow-gold dress wasn't in mourning—and neither was she, I mused. Her husband was barely underground and she was receiving a visitor who sneaked in like a lover.

Feeling the first pulse beats of excitement, I went below and wheeled the black car out to the street. I parked across from the building, half a block down. When at last lover boy hustled out of the Crestview and climbed into a two-tone green Buick, I followed him south, speeding close enough to jot down his license number before dropping back again.

He swerved east on Olympic and led me into the heart of Los Angeles. When he parked in a lot beside the Pacific Mutual Building, I headed back, pausing at a phone booth to check him out. What I got surprised me.

Bryan Fuller, age thirty-three. Single. Employed by Pacific Mutual Life Insurance Company, claims department. Home address, Glendale.

I found that information rather intriguing. It suggested all kinds of possibilities. We knew that Don Rainey's life had been insured by Pacific Mutual in the amount of twenty thousand dollars. Settlement of the claim was pending. However, we had never heard of Bryan Fuller, did not know that anyone employed by Pacific Mutual

was holding hands with the late Don Rainey's wife.

So maybe all the killings were not connected by the same motive or the same killer.

I phoned Lieutenant Galloway and filled him in on these developments; then I drove back to the Crestview Towers for a chat with Barbara Rainey.

On an impulse I paused in the hallway of the seventh floor. There were two large gate windows. One opened upon a fire escape, the other was just left of the elevator and looked down upon the small back court which had received the bodies of Jack Meyers and Don Rainey.

This latter window was open, I discovered. It had a dangerously low sill. A man could broad-jump over it into space.

I bent forward and looked down. The narrow court was beside the laundry room at basement level, adding an extra floor, to make eight. The distance seemed immense, the cement floor of the court a pinpoint target. My head reeled, my gut sickened as I projected an image of myself tumbling out and down into that void with its terminal explosion of relentless pavement meeting flesh and bone.

If a man could think at all in those last hurtling moments, I wondered, what screaming, splintered message would electrify his brain?

I recoiled from the window, turned quickly and went to Barbara Rainey's door. Apparently she

was expecting no one and this time the bell didn't summon her in any great hurry. I had the impression that she was a bit startled at sight of me, though I am not startling.

I have been told that I have a mild, rather studious face and that despite my size and muscular development, I could easily pass for an English professor, a bookkeeper, or even a minister. Perhaps. But I don't like generalizations. I once met a priest with the stereotype features of a hood. And there are hoods who look just as priests are supposed to look.

As for Barbara Rainey, she was a petite brunette in her late twenties with features of placid beauty and a figure that was racier than the first dip of a roller coaster and much more exciting. I noticed that she was wearing the same yellow-gold dress.

Her wide, liquid brown eyes had a look of awakening from deep sleep to the somber memory of some dark dream. In contrast, her long slender eyebrows were hoisted as if, with a little more effort, they could form question marks.

"Yes? What is it?" she said in a way that was cool but not actually impolite.

"I'm Ross Lyon," I announced cheerfully. "I'll be taking over the management here from time to time and Mr. Ellis has given me a free hand to improve certain conditions, satisfy complaints, things of that sort," I exaggerated. "May I

come in a moment, Mrs. Rainey?"

Her eyes said no but her delicate shoulders gave a little shrug of surrender and she stepped aside. I went in. She had added some touches of color to the pallid decor of the Crestview, replaced some of the sagging antiques furnished by the management with a graceful section sofa and a couple of modern chairs.

"Very nice," I said. "You've done a lot with a little." She sat. I did the same.

"I've done a lot with the little they have to offer here," she answered in a musical voice which rebuked without sounding a sour note.

"That's true. But the rent is also little," I replied in defense of nothing but my pretense of official capacity.

There was a pause, after which she said, "Well, what can I do for you, Mr. Lyon—or vice-versa."

I smiled. "Vice-versa, of course. We don't have a big budget, but within reason we'd like to bring about any small improvements that would make the tenants happy. I'd like your opinion."

She sighed. "The whole place is a filthy mess, a disgrace. Just walk around the building and you'll get the picture. But I think you should question some of the other tenants who consider this their permanent home. I don't intend to remain here when my rent is up. I've had some financial problems or I would have

been gone the day after my husband—”

She trailed off, staring into space. I had been waiting for just such an opening.

I said, “That’s quite understandable, Mrs. Rainey. I’m sure you would be happier in a new environment and I’d like to offer my sympathy over the loss of your husband. It took courage to remain at all under the circumstances,” I finished, laying it on thick.

She looked at me steadily for a moment and then she surprised me. Her lovely face began to crumple, tears sprang to her eyes and fled down her cheeks. She stood and moved across the room to a window.

She began to sob softly. Apparently she had lost control of her emotions and as she wept on and on, I grew more and more uncomfortable. Puzzled, but convinced that she wasn’t performing just for my benefit, I got up and went to her. Timidly, I draped an arm about her.

She turned at once and, little girl lost, cried with her head against my shoulder. Then she broke away and returned to her chair. I followed.

Erasing tears with the crook of a dainty finger, she said apologetically, “You’re one of the first to say a kind word to me. Most everyone else was merely curious, staring as if I were some sort of—of an exhibit in a wax museum.”

“I’m sure it’s only that people

are too shy to express what they feel,” I comforted. “Anyway, it’s good for you to let go. What could be more natural than to shed tears for the one person you probably loved most in the world?”

I had expected her to go into a song and dance about undying love, but she said, “Whatever I felt for Don in the end, it wasn’t love. Pity, perhaps. I didn’t hate him. I didn’t want him to die. I wanted him to live and be happy—but not with me.

“Don was an incurable skirt chaser. He was night manager for a second rate hotel a few blocks away. It was a job that gave him plenty of opportunity to pursue his hobby.”

I said, “Have you tried to guess who murdered him—or why?”

“I couldn’t begin to guess who did such a thing,” she said firmly.

“Do you believe the police theory that all three were murdered by the same killer, and for the same reason?”

“Yes, I’m sure of it. Everything points to it.”

Remembering Bryan Fuller as he looked sneaking into her apartment, remembering the twenty thousand dollar insurance policy, I was suspicious of her too positive declaration that the three murders were connected.

“What happened the night your husband was killed? That is, if you don’t mind talking about it. Now that I’m involved here, I can’t help

being curious. Concerned is a better word."

She said, "There isn't much to talk about. Don called about midnight, said he'd be home soon after three when his shift ended. I didn't wait up, I fell asleep. I was awakened by this furious pounding at my door. I pulled on a robe and went to answer.

"Eileen O'Hara and Ben Kaplow were standing there in the hallway. Eileen is a big, blonde Jayne Mansfield type who came out here from Nebraska to be a movie star and wound up a car-hop. She means well, but she's not very bright.

"Ben Kaplow, who lives on the same floor, is cozy with her. Ben is a bartender. He works nights in a little bar right across the street, The Hideaway. Ben is fun and good-natured. He can out-talk an auctioneer. Yet he was standing at my door, speechless, his lips moving without sound, his face pale and damp, his eyes wide with horrible shock.

"It's your husband," Eileen blurted. "He just fell out a window and he looks dead. You'd better come down and see, honey." Eileen is not cruel; she simply blunders.

"I got the message but it was so blunt, so startling that I couldn't believe it. So I had to be convinced. I had to go down there and see for myself. I shouldn't have. It was a dreadful mistake."

Her face tightened, she sat mo-

tionless and withdrawn. I asked her how those two had discovered the body.

"They were in the laundry room," Barbara Rainey said. "Eileen was washing clothes, her own and some of Ben's too. They're both night owls and that was rather typical of them—washing clothes after three in the morning.

"The laundry room has a window facing the court where Don—They heard the sound, even above the machines—the—the impact of the body. So they looked out and—and they saw it. Ben crawled through the window and discovered it was Don.

"Then the police came in droves and—"

She paused, cocking her head. From another room came the muted trill of the phone. She chased after the sound, returned in a minute.

"It's a business call," she said. "Some legal matters. I'm afraid I'll be tied up for awhile. Will you excuse me?"

I had a hunch the call was from Bryan Fuller on a matter of insurance—and murder. But I decided not to give it a second thought; I was leaving anyway.

She reached out and gave my hand a squeeze. "Please come back," she said. "Anytime. I'm rather lonely and I'd like to talk with you again."

I told her I'd be back—for sure. And meant it. But I knew Barbara

Rainey would never be lonely, even if Bryan Fuller got scared and ran for the Mexican border.

CONSULTING THE roster, I spent a couple of hours ringing door bells, introducing myself, playing out my role. Ralph Ellis, had been right. More than half the tenants were elderly people of the sort who could hardly be suspected of raging violence. On these I wasted little time.

Also, there were two secretaries, a fashion model and the car-hop, Eileen O'Hara, all at work or absent for one reason or another. I discounted these, but not entirely.

Homicide had not overlooked the possibility that a total stranger to the Crestview Towers had committed the crimes. But the doors to the building were locked after sunset and a night watch since the murder of Rainey had uncovered no suspicious characters about.

Finally, tenants who had vacated since the murders were under surveillance.

Shortly after three I took a break and went across the street to The Hideaway. Earlier, I had gone to greet the bartender, Ben Kaplow, at his apartment. When he didn't answer, I figured he might be working the day shift. He was.

The Hideaway was a dim, narrow bar sandwiched between a grocery market and a hardware store. It consisted of an ebony bar, half a dozen booths and a juke box. There were two customers, a mid-

dle-aged couple sipping beer in the silence of separate contemplation, as if they had long ago forgotten whatever language had brought them together.

As I fed coins to the cigarette machine, the couple departed. Mounting a stool, I ordered a martini from the guy I presumed to be Ben Kaplow. He was a solid, middle-sized man in his late thirties. His sparse, light brown hair was arranged to cover bald islands of his scalp; he had a craggy, good-natured face and bright, restless eyes.

When he brought the drink I asked if he was Ben Kaplow. He was. I introduced myself and we made small talk for a time, warming up to each other. He was a type who seemed hungry for friendship, extending himself eagerly. In a few minutes we were old buddies. I told him casually that I lived at the Crestview and would be working there as part-time manager.

"But you won't last three days," he said cheerfully.

"Why not?" I asked him.

"It's a nut house," he said. "Mostly full of old crabs and young creeps—all nuts, one way or another. It's Murder Incorporated. You got to walk the halls with a machine-gun." He began to clean his nails with a toothpick.

"Then why do you hang there?" I questioned.

"Because I'm one of the nuts." He chuckled. "Besides, it's con-

venient and I'm lazy." Pause. "How's that drink dry enough?" "Like shredded wheat." He grinned. "You married? Bring the wife and kids?" "Nope. Solo."

"Maybe you came to the right place, then." Winking, he leaned forward confidentially. "You want some action?"

"What kind of action?"

"You kidding? What has long hair, long slim legs and a soft body?"

"I give up."

"A spider!"

"Okay, I asked for that one. Now give me the straight dope," I urged.

Ben said, "I know all the dames worth knowing at the Crestview. Been out with 'em all. We got a couple of lemons you can forget. The others are real ripe tomatoes." He winked again. "Maybe I could set you up with a live one and some night we could make the scene."

"Good deal. You got a name for this live one?"

"Take your choice. There's two secretaries, Lorna and June. They're both lookers but Lorna is a snob, a phony. So forget Lorna and make your play for June. Then there's Eileen O'Hara, a car-hop with more curves than a pretzel. She's mine, but nothing serious. I play the field."

"The best of the lot is Cindy Burke. Mantrap like you never

seen and a real sport." A wink. "Listen, you want an affidavit, I'll give you one. She turned me every way but loose. Yeah, that's the one for you."

"Think so?"

He nodded. "Don't get me wrong—she's particular. But a guy like you should make out like a bandit. If you wanna meet her, just go down to the mail room most any morning at ten. She'll be there waiting for the mail, while she calls her agent and the studios on the public phone. She's a fashion model but she's tryin' real hard to break into pictures."

Pretending interest, I said, "That's a bit complicated. Why don't you just introduce us?"

He made a face. "Not me! Any-one but me. We were thick but I turned her off when I found out she wanted to go the marriage route. She's still carrying the torch."

I had difficulty keeping a straight face. Apparently all the gals who had ever come in contact with Ben were carrying a torch for him.

"Well," I said, "I'll have to make it a point to meet Cindy, one way or another. And thanks for the tip."

"Any time, Ross. You can't miss her. She's the only redhead in the building. Lemme know how you make out. I got a dozen others if you don't hit it off."

I said, "If it comes to that, I'll take that cute little brunette on my floor. Don't know her name," I

lied, "but I nearly flipped when I saw her get off the elevator."

"What floor you on?"

"Seven. I'm in Seven-C."

He frowned. "That would be Mrs. Rainey, Barbara Rainey. Skip it. She's got the blues for her husband."

"She the one who was married to Don Rainey, the guy who got shoved out a window?" I said innocently.

"Yeah, that one. I should know. I was there when he bounced off the pavement, me 'n Eileen O'Hara. And I got the first look at him after he took the dive. Eight floors, if you count the basement." He shook his head gravely. "My God, what a sight! If I live to be a hundred—"

"Who would do a thing like that?" I asked him.

"Some nut right over there," he answered, pointing toward the Crestview. "If those dumb cops could tell a nut from a bolt they'd have found out who it was long ago. You take a guy like me who watches and listens behind a bar night after night, makes a study of human nature. I could narrow it down to about three or four screwballs, five at the most."

"Maybe so," I said doubtfully, still goading him. "But it's not that easy. People seem to be one thing and then you find out they're something else entirely. We all wear masks, one for every occasion."

"Exactly!" he answered quickly, cocking a finger at me. "Now you

said it! For instance, I give you Ralph Ellis, our esteemed manager and part owner of that sewer. Did he tell you how he got that bad leg?"

I nodded. "Motorcycle spill."

"Bull! He got into a beef with some loud-noise kid beatniks, the kind with the long hair and the tight jeans. He went outta his skull, got a strangle hold on one; the other, Dusty Bixler, busted his leg with a sawed-off baseball bat."

"What did the cops do about that one?"

"They never got wind of it. Ellis knew he went wild enough to kill one of them long-hairs. He kept his mouth shut. You thought Ellis was tame, I'll bet. Rip off the mask and he's a crazy hot-head."

"So you got Ellis and you got the beatniks for openers. Another weirdo is Willie Sabel, a big oaf with a child's brain. Lives with his mama, who's even nuttier. The old man ran out on her, ran off with a live one when Willie was fifteen. She's on a religious kick, belongs to one of them outer space local sects that shout everything and everyone down as evil, consider themselves the rightful, hellfire, almighty judges of humanity."

"These two have a paper route they work together from about four to eight mornings. Pays good dough. Willie is a brainless ape who does exactly what mama tells him, and that includes a few things you don't learn in school, either."

"How you like that combination? Then we got a Mexican sweep-up who was born with a knife in both hands and sometimes late at night he—"

Ben was interrupted by the arrival of two giggling females who demanded drinks they didn't need, since obviously they had already consumed their quota. When I saw that Ben was serving them more conversation than booze, I left a buck on the bar and departed, taking with me some fresh ammunition for the hunt.

According to my chart, Dusty "Beatnik" Bixler and company lounged in 2B. I blistered a finger poking their bell-button, but got no response. Willie and Martha Sabel lived a floor above, directly overhead in 3B. I went up.

Mrs. S came to the door. She was a long, narrow drink of water, about fifty with dirty gray hair. She had a hard, pointy-pinched face and she wore thick-lensed glasses which bugged her eyes so that they seemed about to leap out and swarm all over you.

Her bony frame was overwhelmed by a soiled black dress, which sagged to one side and gave her the appearance of being slightly castrated.

I gave her the standard speech, the capsule version. She invited me to partake of some bitter mud described as "coffee," served by Willie, a boy-man in his late twenties who must have been six-foot-six

and two hundred fifty pounds heavier than mama. He had the deceptively bloated sort of flesh which conceals a ton of steel muscle beneath. Baby fat, you might call it for lack of a better definition.

Willie's face was round and jovial—and empty.

Martha Sabel spent the first ten minutes sharply denouncing the ravaged condition of the building, the laxity of the management, the criminal negligence of the owners, the scum level of the tenants. Given time I would have agreed with her. But her scathing monologue bombarded me without pause.

When she finally drew a breath, it was only to shift gears.

"What're you going to do about these murders, mister?" she accused. "We're living in a slaughter house. So far it's pigs to the slaughter, and good riddance. The devil knows his own. But one night it might be a lamb destroyed, even a lamb like my Willie. What're you doing to save the innocent from destruction? Tell me that, mister!"

I found it difficult to picture the sort who could destroy Willie Sabel, but I said, "I can understand your anxiety, Mrs. Sabel. I'm quite sure your son is in no danger, however. Still, I personally can do little to prevent these crimes. It's strictly a matter for the police to handle."

"Nonsense!" she snapped. "There's a lot you can do. You and lame-leg, lame-brain Ellis and the partners. You can toss out the

scum, the evil which infests this snake pit. Why the evil is so strong it has a stench you can almost smell.

"I know the evil ones, I know who they are. The drinkers, the weed smokers, the adulterers and fornicators, the harlots and thieves, I know them all. I know what doors they hide behind. These filth are beyond redemption, beyond reform. Clean them out or Judgement will destroy them in the dark of night. Isn't that so, Willie?"

Slouching in his chair, Willie nodded furiously, mindlessly. "Yes, mother," he answered. "The destruction of evil is the will of God. In prayer and meditation we receive His judgements and we—we are the instruments of His justice. The house of the Lord must be cleaned of iniquity."

Willie recited this in a monotone, as if by rote, somewhat in the manner of a child mouthing Grace at table.

Well, I could speak that language too. So I said, "Willie, there is an evil monster at large in this building, this den of iniquity, hurling people from windows, stabbing them to death. This is the evil one who must be destroyed. But first we have to catch him, Willie. Can you guess who it is?"

Willie stared at me blankly for a long moment. Then his eyes rolled upward in what seemed a parody of deep contemplation. When his gaze returned to mine a slow smile

spread across his baby features, hovering there while his eyes remained empty, vacant as windows in a deserted house.

The smile lingered unnervingly, but he said nothing.

"Willie knows all but speaks no evil," said his mother. "Wise as the serpent, harmless as the dove, that's his motto."

The silence exploded into the sound of violent drums, twanging guitars and strident voices bleating in song.

The song had no clear melody; it was more a chant. The sound mounted from somewhere below, swelling until it threatened to swallow the room.

"The beasts of night awaken early," Martha Sabel sneered.

I looked at her questioningly.

"That's Dusty Bixler and his playmate," she informed me, hoisting her voice above the din. Her face had become a storm of righteous anger. "They got a record player. The minute they open their seedy eyes, first thing they do is turn on that wicked, jazzy junk to the sky. They're bums, the devil's assistants. Weed smokers, pill gobblers. No jobs but they always find money when they need it—muggers, purse snatchers, panderers!"

For a space she sat stonily, the pulsing vibrations of rock 'n roll rising around her like waves of tonal smoke.

Suddenly she covered her ears and screamed. "Stop it, stop it!" she



shouted at me. "Go down there and stop that sound this instant!"

Remembering that I really had no official powers as yet, I glanced at my watch. "It's still early," I told her helplessly.

She turned from me in disgust. "Willie," she commanded, "I want you to go down there and stop that noise, even if you have to smash that phonograph and a couple of empty heads. Move now son! Hurry!"

"Sure, mother," he said delightedly, rising swiftly from his chair. "I'll smash them good. You wait 'n see!"

He started for the door but I stepped into his path, blocking him at no little risk, since he might have crushed me like an egg and bulldozed on without noticing. But he paused dumbly as I told his mother to call him off, I'd handle it.

Glad to escape, I went out and took the stairs below in all haste to prevent disaster.

THE DOOR TO 2B was opened by a tall, slump-shouldered kid who was barely twenty-one. He wore a stained T-shirt, tight pegged pants and Cuban heeled boots. He had a long, girlish mop of rust-brown hair which fell in stringy disorder and curled up at a point below his ears.

His eyes had a look of sleepy impudence as he slouched against the door jam; his nose was sharp and aquiline, sprouting above a mouth which drooped in a lazy sneer.

"You Dusty Bixler?" I asked, nearly shouting above the tornado of sound which came hurtling from the open door to race up and down the corridor.

He shrugged massive shoulders hunched above a thick chest which tapered swiftly to a lean, narrow body, nearly hipless and supported by stilt-thin legs.

"So?"

"So cut the squawk-box down to the size of your pad, will ya, pal?"

You're rattling the windows on the top floor."

"Who're you, dad?" he asked me in a limp voice, softly mocking.

"I'm the Lone Ranger," I told him. "You gonna screw that thing down?"

"Get lost, dad," he said, hardly moving his lips.

I shouldered him aside and bulled into the room. His playmate, a pimply blond, a mop on sticks in the standard tight pants, was draped across the sofa. One leg dangled to the floor, his foot drumming in rhythm to the so-called music, his jaw sagging at sight of me.

The room was a shambles. A broken lamp lay in a corner; cigarette butts had been ground into the rug, a half-eaten sandwich rested on the arm of a chair. Glasses containing the dregs of tired drinks were everywhere; soiled plates, coffee cups, bottles, beer cans and newspapers, littered the floor. There was the taint of marijuana in the stale air.

Glancing over my shoulder I saw Dusty Bixler sneaking up behind me, crouched for action. I made a quarter turn and kicked out sideways. He caught my foot in the chest and went sprawling.

I crossed to the record player and snapped it off. A great maw of silence swallowed the sound in a single gulp, leaving the room in a vacuum which was positively startling.

When I turned, Dusty Bixler

had a stubby baseball bat in his fist.

"This cat wants to play," he snarled. "Let's take him, Goldy."

Dusty sprang toward me with the club raised to brain me. I waited until it was almost too late, then side-stepped swiftly. As he went past I gave him a karate chop at the base of his skull. He pitched forward and flipped over on his back, down but not entirely out. I heard the splintering of glass and Goldy was almost on top of me with a broken bottle clutched in his hand.

The sight of that jagged glass destroyed my sense of humor and gave me the first real taste of fear. Trying to dodge him, I lost balance and fell. When I looked up, Goldy was kneeling over me and the glass knives of the broken bottle were poised to gouge eyes, invade cheeks and slice lips.

The glass prongs descended mightily. I snapped my head to one side and Goldy screamed when the bottle hammered the floor, disintegrated and skewered his hand. To ease his pain I wound back and clobbered his jaw.

Dusty was snaking toward the club which had slipped from his grasp. I told him that was a dangerous move and he believed me. He sat on his haunches, glaring at me from narrowed eyes.

"You're on my list," he growled. "I got plans for you, dad. Big plans, daddy-o."

"You creeps had better crawl

back under your rock and hide," I said, as I turned to leave. "I got plans for you too."

I went up to my apartment, took a shower and changed clothes. After awhile I ate a can of beef stew, seasoned with some bitter thoughts.

Night emptied the dim corridors of the Crestview Towers; the tenants had sealed themselves behind locked doors. There was about the place an air of utter desertion which conspired with an oppressive silence to create an atmosphere of deep gloom and menace.

Around nine o'clock I walked the building from roof to basement, seeking what everyone else was avoiding—a killer lurking in the shadows.

From top to bottom there was neither the sound nor sight of a single human being. I moved from floor to floor in a void of life. However false, I had the uneasy impression that everyone had fled in terror, leaving me alone in a great mausoleum, a tomb of seven stories.

Several cars were parked in the stalls of the grimy subterranean garage. I walked among them, glancing inside, unlocked a connecting door to the basement and entered a dusky, littered corridor. Typically, some of the naked twenty-five watt bulbs were out and I walked in semi-darkness past the furnace and store rooms enroute to the elevator.

I came to the laundry room.

Usually lighted, it was dark. Peering inside I glimpsed the bulky silhouette of a man. He stood at the window which opened upon the paved court where the shattered bodies of Meyers and Rainey had been discovered.

He was leaning out the window, gazing skyward. Hearing me, he bent back inside and turned quickly toward the light from the corridor. I could just make him out.

It was Bryan Fuller.

I squinted, made the face of a man unable to see in the gloom and went on up to the lobby, taking the stairs. In a moment I heard the elevator grinding upward. I watched the indicator. It circled until it touched seven, paused.

This wasn't the time to challenge Mr. Bryan Fuller; I wanted to give him a bit more rope. But I knew where to find him—with Barbara Rainey.

It was obvious that she had given him a key to the lobby door and now he was free to prowl the building.

As I pressed the button and waited for the car to return, the outside door opened and a young woman stepped into the lobby. She carried a couple of paper sacks laden with groceries. She was glancing about nervously as she came toward the elevator.

Seeing me, she broke stride, hesitated. She was a redhead of striking proportions and though I couldn't see her face clearly in the gloom,

I knew it had to be Cindy Burke, the "live" one described by Ben Kaplow as worthy of my immediate attention.

"Don't be frightened, Miss Burke," I called. "I'm Ross Lyon, the newly elected manager of this dreary asylum."

"Oh, all right," she gasped, and approached as the elevator arrived, shedding its light upon her.

She was tall and had a fine, willowy figure but her features beneath a crown of shoulder-length, flame-red hair, were disappointing. She had a sharp little nose, an overabundant mouth and a slightly receding chin.

Doubtless she had the figure of a fashion model but her face would not startle the movie producers.

As we got aboard the elevator and I took her groceries in charge, she said, "How did you know who I was?"

Ready with the lie, I told her it was my business to identify the tenants on sight and that Mr. Ellis had remarked, in passing, that she was the only redhead in the building.

She accepted this willingly enough, smiling in a way which lighted her whole face. As we climbed to her floor, she studied me frankly and appreciatively with the most man-hungry eyes I have ever seen.

She positively throbbed with female magnetism; an electric storm of sex appeal hovered about her.

And suddenly it wasn't hard to understand what Ben Kaplow had been trying to say about her.

When she had opened her door, she asked me if I would deposit her supplies in the kitchen. She was wearing a taut silky green sheath and as I followed her undulations across the living room, it came to me that I was in no hurry to leave. I placed the bags on a kitchen table and lit a cigarette.

"Would you like a drink—Ross?" she asked. "Mind if I call you by your first name?"

"Yes, I'd like a drink, thanks. And no I don't mind if you call me by my first name, especially since you remembered it."

"I can remember anything that interests me. You married, Ross?"

"No. But if I were?"

"It would only be a bit more complicated. How about a martini?"

She built a whole shaker of martinis and we moved to a sofa in the living room, where she had three in rapid succession while I nursed one as we talked easily. There was no pretense about her. She spoke with the direct, unguarded honesty of a man in company with an old friend.

I told her my pre-fabricated story. She said she was a fashion model trying desperately to crash the movies and having no luck at all. She detailed a few of her abortive attempts with wry humor.

Eventually the conversation

drifted to the murders. Of the three murdered men, she had known only Jack Meyers—just as someone to chat with in passing. Shortly after Barbara Rainey's husband was killed she had stopped Barbara in the lobby to console her. They had become quite good friends.

One day, Cindy confided, she had gone upstairs to visit Barbara unexpectedly. A most attractive man was just then leaving her apartment. Barbara had quickly explained that the man was a representative of the company which had insured her husband's life. He had taken a personal interest in her complex claim and was trying to expedite payment.

"Don Rainey was insured for twenty thousand dollars," Cindy declared. I pretended surprise. "Yes, and Barbara's having a tough time collecting. Unless the police find out who murdered her husband, she may not be able to collect at all. It's up to the beneficiary to prove responsibility in a death of this kind."

Cindy poured still another martini which I didn't drink, though she gulped hers down. "Barbara is so terribly lonely now," she continued. "Most everyone is lonely in this awful world—don't you think? You look lonely, Ross. You have sad, lonely eyes. Are you lonely?"

"I'm lonely, yes. And you, Cindy?"

"Oh, all the time! Even at a party, in the midst of people. In a

crowd, anywhere, I'm lonely. To escape being lonely you've got to be in tune with someone, right on the same wave length. And he's got to love you."

She sounded wretched, pathetic. I put my arm around her and when she lifted her face expectantly, I kissed her.

She pushed me away gently and peered into my eyes. "Do you love me, Ross?" she pleaded.

Astonished, I started to tell her honestly that love takes more than an hour to grow, even when the seed of it is planted in a martini. But her eyes begged and I didn't have the heart. Such a little thing to say if it brings a quick tide of joy.

"Yes," I answered, "for whatever it's worth, and at this particular moment, I love you, Cindy."

"Then I'm not alone," she murmured, and kissed me. Kissed me as if she had been ignited, as if the fire of her needing burned out of control.

I LEFT HER soon after one in the morning and went across the street to The Hideaway for a nightcap. Ben Kaplow had been replaced by a gray little bartender with a pixie face and a Scottish accent. But Ben was there just the same, taking a busman's holiday with Eileen O'Hara.

At least, I learned that she was Eileen O'Hara when he introduced us. She had only two things in common with Jayne Mansfield—she

was big and blonde. She wore a vapid expression and was a pretty dull sort who said little in a gush of words. When she went to the john I told Ben of my encounter with Cindy. Surprised and delighted, he asked me how we got along. When I told him frankly, he gave me a sly wink.

"You see? Would I steer you wrong, old buddy?" he said.

Eileen O'Hara returned, I grew bored and left. I made a final tour of the building, prepared to put an ocean of sleep between myself and the problem. I had started in the basement this time and had hiked my way up to the sixth floor uneventfully. Whether by accident or design, there was only one feeble light aglow on six. Beyond this light the corridor was in deep shadow.

I groped along uneasily, hugging the wall. I had come to a point near the fire escape when a stealthy centipede of fear crept up my spine and bristled my scalp. I heard no sound but I got the message just the same.

Someone was behind me!

I whirled!

A figure loomed up out of the darkness and became Ralph Ellis sneaking toward me. He wasn't limping. He carried his cane extended in front of him like a weapon—which it was. From the tip of the cane a slender, rapier-like blade of sharply pointed steel protruded. The blade was long

enough to impale a man with a single thrust.

Ellis danced toward me with the blade aimed at my middle. I was backing to take advantage of deeper darkness when his mouth yawned in surprise.

"Lyon!" he exploded. "Is that you! I thought it was—well, I figured you for someone else and I was getting ready to stab you down." He fumbled with the cane and the blade retreated. Cautiously, I closed some of the distance between us.

"What happened to your limp?" I asked him scornfully.

He stared down at his leg, then back to me. He managed to look so incredulous that I wanted to applaud his acting.

"The—the pain just vanished," he said in an awed voice. "I know you won't believe it, but for a few seconds there I was so intent that I felt nothing but the need to move and fight. Can you believe that?"

"I believe what I see, and not very much of that."

Our eyes locked for an instant. He scowled, then turned and limped away to the elevator, his back a solid wall between us. I figured that was the end of my phony job. But perhaps I didn't need it any more. Not if the hunt was over, not if I could tie Ellis to a motive.

I took some hasty ideas on that subject up to bed with me. Lying in the darkness, chain smoking, I caught the thread of something

which had to do with a crazy landlord who fought with his tenants, resented his partners and cut murder clippings from the newspapers.

But when I joined these pieces of the puzzle they still didn't reveal a logical motive. So I sent the problem down into my subconscious and went to sleep.

At the other end of a long tunnel, someone was knocking on a door. I opened my eyes and listened. It was *my* door. I snapped on a light and studied my watch. It was five minutes after three.

I padded to the living room and looked out through the one-way peephole. I could see no one; there was just the drab, empty corridor, dim as twilight. I returned to the bedroom. I was nearly dressed when I heard the knock again, soft, but insistent.

Why not use the bell? I thought, then remembered that like everything else at the Crestview Towers, it wasn't working. I pulled on my shoes and went again for a look through the peephole.

Nothing. Really nothing. Black-out! The corridor had been obliterated by total darkness.

I doused the one lamp I had lighted in the living room. Quietly, I opened the door a crack, intending to do no more than listen for the sound of movement.

Instantly, someone shouldered the door out of my grasp. Guessing the next move, I ducked, but not fast enough. Something came club-

bing down with bone-crushing force and glanced off my skull.

Barely conscious, I sagged to the floor. My mind flickered like a candle in the wind and went out.

I came to in what must have been less than a minute. There was the jogging sensation of being carried. My brain was numb, groping for a thought. Was I blind? The darkness was absolute.

But then the jogging ceased and I did see a distant light. And another. And still another. They shimmered, winking from far below, almost as if seen obliquely from the cabin of a low-flying plane.

I caught on then—knew the shuddering truth that I was cradled in someone's arms at the lip of an open window. Glancing straight down, I could see the cold perpendicular face of the building descending sharply to meet the flat, remorseless pavement of the court at basement level.

Death was eight stories and eight seconds away.

The lights dipped and spun. Fear on bat wings swooped down upon me. Then a shrieking rocket of terror burst in my head.

In a micro-second my head had cleared. The hand at the end of my dangling arm became a stone fist, my muscles coiled. I swung with all my might at the blur of a face, smashing flesh and bone.

I was rewarded by a howl of pain and release. I fell across the

sill with a jarring thud and began to slide into space. But I caught an edge of wood just in time to grasp it and flip back inside.

I heard the thunder of feet descending the stairs. The elevator was gone and I knew it was too late to catch him. Instead, I made a wild, stumbling dash for my apartment in the blackness.

Inside, I switched on the overhead, scooped the telescopic rifle from the closet and leapt for a window, hurling it open.

He was just then scampering down the front steps, coming under a street light. He paused for a moment, glancing over his shoulder, and I framed him in the scope as I released the safety. Though I had broken his nose and half of his face was a smear of blood, I recognized him easily.

It was Ben Kaplow.

I lowered my aim and squeezed the trigger. The shot caught him squarely in the hip. After a moment of shock, he stumbled on, couldn't make it, fell to the walk and lay writhing there.

I put up the rifle and got the .38 from the suitcase. Watching from the window, I strapped it on and covered it with my coat. Then I raced down.

I bent over him.

"Why?" I asked him.

He shook his head dumbly, winced in pain, clutched his hip. "Who shot me?"

"Got you with my hunting rifle,"

I answered, not wanting him to know I was a cop. "Did you kill them all, Ben?"

He nodded.

"Why did you do it, Ben?"

"Cindy," he murmured. "I love her."

I said that didn't make sense—nothing made sense. But he refused to explain, so I carried him inside and stretched him on a sofa near the phone. Watching him, I dialed Lieutenant Hollaway and rapidly told him how it ended.

He said he'd send an ambulance and come himself in a squad car.

By agreement, the minute Hollaway entered the lobby, I did a fade-out, went up to my apartment. For me, the case was closed.

Exhausted, I slept until past noon, then called Homicide. Kaplow had given every detail of the three murders, yet after hours of probing and prodding he still would not confess his strange motive. Not until morning when Cindy Burke was brought to the station to confront him.

But to go back a bit, how could Kaplow have been the killer when he was in the laundry room with Eileen O'Hara at the very second when Don Rainey's body plummeted to the court just outside?

Ben was quite pleased with his answer to that one. He had heaved Rainey from the window minutes before he went with Eileen to the laundry room. Then he pretended to hear the meal-sack thump of the

body, easily convincing dull-witted Eileen that she must have heard it also. Eileen was hypnotized by Kaplow's magnetism. She worshiped him. Whatever he said was gospel.

As for Kaplow's weird motivation, it began with his insane, possessive love for Cindy Burke. He wanted to marry her. It was the all-consuming need, the dominant purpose of his life. Cindy was uncertain; Kaplow kept at her. He was so fearfully aggressive that one day while he was at work, she packed her bags and vanished.

Ben was a tireless detective. He tracked her to that most unlikely sanctuary, the Crestview Towers. He moved in and it began again. He begged her to marry him; he demanded, he threatened. Cindy had completely cooled, but she was afraid of Ben.

So she stalled. She told Ben she couldn't live with a jealous, possessive, tyrant of a man. He was smothering her. But if he could prove a change of attitude and temperament for the next several months, she would marry him. During that time they were to live entirely separate lives, making no demands upon each other.

This was nothing but a dodge, Ben snapped. Cindy wanted her freedom so that she could ball it up with every guy who aroused her interest. Cindy was trapped by her own denial of this truth. She was forced to promise absolute fidelity



during the trial period—no dates, no flirtations. It was a one-sided arrangement, Ben would do as he pleased.

Still, Ben did not believe Cindy; he did not trust her. From his twisted mind came a twisted plan. He would test her faithfulness by goading certain playboy types into dating her.

Enter Jack Meyers, Don Rainey and Bernie Hickman, not to mention myself. Their speedy exit from life followed their man-to-man progress report which Ben solicited with a pretense of casual inquiry.

Ben Kaplow was a killer with the devil's own character. He tempted his victims, then punished them for taking the bait. He was also a masochist driven by the urge to torture himself.

Cindy? She was never once aware of the game. She thought her flirtations, her shallow involvements were cautious and secret. She spoke of them to no one. And who would tell Ben?

A crazy, unusual case of warped love and murder? One in a million? Unusual, yes. But not one in a million, simply one of dozens. For example, there was the time I was sent undercover to play chauffeur for a rich guy whose second wife was murdered on their wedding night. This guy had a son who should have been locked in a psycho ward, but because old dad had all that cash—

Well, some other time, maybe. Because right now I'm going across the hall to tell Barbara Rainey that since Ben Kaplow confessed to murdering her husband, she can soon collect twenty thousand bucks

insurance. Naturally, there are secrets I will have to keep—about myself.

But who wants to talk shop with a sweet gal like Barbara Rainey? She's a very special breed, a thoroughbred in every sense of the word, a woman of character. It was no fault of her's that a love-sick Bryan Fuller was compelled to do a bit of snooping beyond the call of duty.

Yes, I was attracted to Barbara from the first minute I saw her, to put it mildly. And really, I never did think she was the sort to become involved in murder.

Or did I?



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A thief he had been. Probably a madman as well. He had followed evil ways and had written his own ticket to the hell he had been seeking. Now he was dead, and only one thing stood between him and the oblivion he deserved. Mike Shayne had promised a girl to find his killer, even if other good men died along the way . . .



THE JACK OF CLUBS

by

THEODORE MATHIESON

He was everything a woman would want.
But he was dead—and I had done it!

BY HIS FOURTH professional reading of the cards, Mark Tarot was sure that his pretty Querent had murder in her mind, and that he was in love with her.

"Who is it?" he asked quietly as she picked up the Jack of Clubs from the layout. He looked at her through her new glasses and when their eyes met, he found that no explanations were necessary.

"My husband. He's such a gymnastic bore, as well as a sadist."

"Why not a divorce?"

"He'd take the child. He had reason once—a long time ago. Besides, there's all that money—"

"Murder is dangerous."

"So is love." She reached over and touched him, and in a moment of blind desire, he took her in his arms . . .

Her husband, Phil Latour, in singlet and shorts, stood in his private gymnasium wielding a pair of Indian clubs, as Mark Tarot entered.

It was night, and the big house was quiet.

"Maida said you sell gym equipment, and I ought to see you," Latour said, stifling a yawn. "I don't know why. I've got everything I need."

"You're an artist with the clubs, I see," Mark said, "but have you

ever seen a neat pair like these?"

He opened a leather case, revealing a handsome set of red lacquered clubs. Repeating a sales talk he'd heard just that afternoon, when in disguise he'd bought the set, he said:

"Made of a Burmese wood so hard that it blunts the sharpest tool."

Desire glimmered in Latour's eyes as, setting aside his working clubs, he bent forward to gaze upon the polished wood. Now was the moment.

Seizing one of Latour's working clubs, Mark raised it, but then the purpose seemed to go out of him. He couldn't bring himself to kill, not even for Maida.

At that moment Latour, turning, saw Mark's intent, and grappled him.

The man was a tiger, but Mark succeeded presently in pushing him over a bar bell, and in the instant of his adversary's helplessness, brought the club swinging down upon his head.

Latour lay still, and in the sudden silence, Maida entered.

"Is it done?" she asked.

"I don't know."

"You've got to make sure," she said tensely.

"I couldn't strike him again."

"Then I will," she said, and taking one of the heavy lacquered clubs from the case, swung it hard at the head on the floor.

Mark turned away at the sound

of the sickening crunch, and when he looked again, Maida was holding out a packet of hundred dollar bills to him.

"This is in payment for a series of card readings," she said coldly, "and that's all it is."

"But Maida, I thought—"

"You thought wrong. Now get out of her and take these new clubs with you. I'll phone the police and tell them a traveling salesman did it. You'd better take a vacation."

"But your maid servant saw me."

"Edith will give the description I give her. Now go."

Mark went.

But he couldn't forget Maida. For three days he sat in his apartment, having cancelled all his readings, and told his own fortune, seeing Maida appearing in the layout again and again with a jack of clubs, so he knew there must be another man.

Finally, his jealousy inflamed, he went out and bought himself a .45 revolver. That night he returned to the big house and peered in the windows, where, sure enough, he saw Maida in the arms of another man who looked very much like Latour, except he was taller.

Unable to contain himself, he broke into the house through the french doors, and confronted them.

"Now, Mark," Maida said soothingly, "you forgot I found out you

weren't a killer. You won't harm us, because you can't pull the trigger."

At which Mark tried, and when he found he couldn't, he stood there nakedly ashamed at his impotence to kill. Even the man laughed.

"Now go home, like a good boy,

and be satisfied with your money," Maida said.

So Mark went, and he thought and he thought, and he knew that he couldn't do anything about it.

Except what he did.

Which was to wrap up the box of Indian clubs and mail it to the police.



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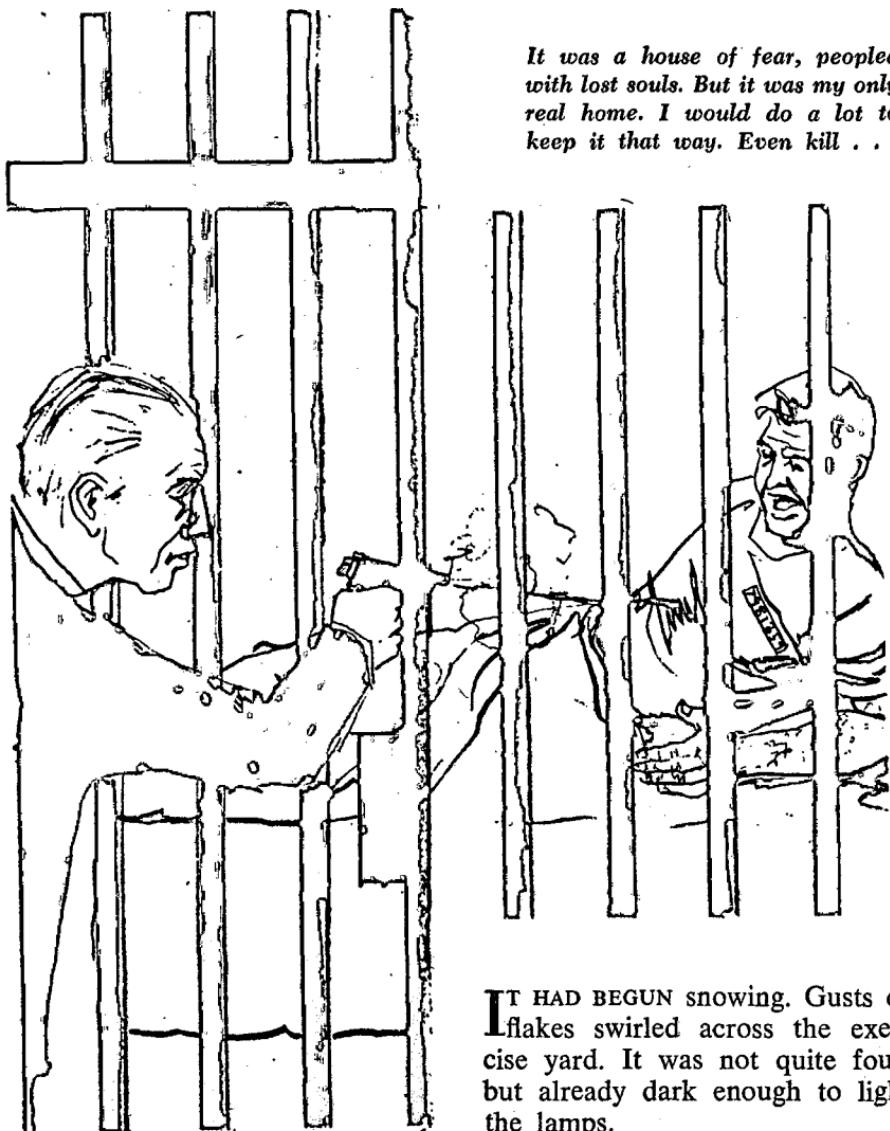
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LEO MARGULIES, Publisher

UNDER A COLD SUN

by JACK RITCHIE



It was a house of fear, peopled with lost souls. But it was my only real home. I would do a lot to keep it that way. Even kill . . .

IT HAD BEGUN snowing. Gusts of flakes swirled across the exercise yard. It was not quite four, but already dark enough to light the lamps.

I went back to my desk and sat down. I took the snub-nosed .38 from the top drawer and broke it open to check the six bullets again.

One should be enough, but you could never tell.

Could I think of myself as The Avenging Angel?

I smiled slightly.

The inter-com buzzed and Hackett, my inmate-secretary, announced that Assistant Warden Frawley was here for our daily conference.

I closed the gun and put it into my pocket.

When Frawley came in, I motioned him to a chair, as usual. And, as usual, I gave him permission to light one of his cigars.

He's a competent, hard-working man, I thought, and tomorrow he'll have my job.

"Nothing special today, Warden," Frawley said. "Except that one of the guards wants to quit."

I nodded. "Carson. I had a talk with him. The usual reason. He can get twice as much money doing something else."

Hackett brought our coffee and the cream and sugar.

Frawley remembered something else. "Kapinski's on a hunger strike again."

"Forget it," I said. "They never last more than two or three days until he finishes the chocolate bars he's squirreled away someplace."

But Frawley knew about that too. He knew just about as much

about the place and the people in it as I did.

Would he abolish the late afternoon conference when he took over? Actually there was seldom anything that called for it. But it was a nice break toward the end of the day.

I almost asked him, but—no, that would be interfering.

My eyes went to Hackett, pouring the coffee.

Gray-haired now. He'd been here about as along as I had. But in this case there was no mandatory retirement age.

Frawley sipped his coffee. "Well, by this time next week, you'll at least be someplace where it's warm."

I put sugar into my cup. How often had I studied the travel literature? Florida, California, New Mexico. How often had I dreamed of sitting in the sun?

How long had it been since I'd been fishing? Almost twenty years? Just about the time Bob went off to college.

My eyes went to the window and across the yard to the lights of the warden's house, the only civilian building within the walls. Only a few of those left now, I thought. In the old days they used to be common, but they're not included in the new plans anymore.

When I had become warden fourteen years ago, I had moved

into the big house. It consisted of two stories, with a cavern of an attic, and the one hundred year-old building contained twelve high-ceilinged rooms.

In its time, more than a dozen wardens and their families had occupied the building. Children had been born here and some of its people had died here.

But I was alone and I woke often in the night, sometimes wandering through the empty rooms, and once even going up to the attic.

After two weeks, I moved out.

I had one of the file rooms off my office emptied and a bed, dresser, and a few chairs installed. The room was small and plain and it viewed the drabness of the yard, but for my purposes, it was sufficient.

Re-reading the regulations, I discovered that there was no official impediment to allowing the assistant warden and his family to occupy the warden's house and I so informed Frawley.

He, his wife, and their four children moved into the building immediately. They were quite thankful, since the building was offered rent-free and—though there was nothing so authorized in black and white print—it was customary to see that the house was well-staffed with inmate servants, from cook to baby-sitters.

After the novelty of the first years, however, Frawley's wife



availed herself of every opportunity to leave the prison enclosure. She seemed depressed by her surroundings, and I thought that if it weren't for the circumstances of a rent-free home and the servants, she would have insisted upon moving back outside the walls.

Now I sipped my coffee. "I've been going over some figures. Did you know that our average lifer here lives six years longer than a person on the outside?"

Frawley smiled. "It's the regular hours, the nourishing food, the medical care, and no opportunity for bad habits."

I nodded. "Six extra years of life. Is that a punishment? Or a reward?"

He thought about that. "For the ones who get used to their cells, it's a reward."

My phone rang, and Evans, at the reception section, informed me that the van had pulled in with today's new prisoners. I lis-

tened for a few more moments and then cradled the phone.

"The van's in," I said.

Frawley was interested. "Is Tragon with the batch?"

"Yes," I said.

Charles P. Tragon. Gardener and handy man. One day he had walked into a man's home and tied up the owner, his wife, and their three children. He had ransacked the house and when he had not found enough money, he had shot them all, one by one.

Frawley apparently thought about that too. "Makes you wish we still had the death penalty."

I said nothing.

He puffed his cigar. "In the old days, you got the chair for practically anything." He shook his head. "I won't say that was right, but why do people always go from one extreme to the other? Now nobody gets the chair. Nobody at all. No matter what damned thing he's done."

I studied my teaspoon. "And you think Tragon should be executed?"

Frawley nodded. "Him and at least a dozen others we're pampering here." He put down his cup. "Should we go down and take a look at Tragon?"

We found our overcoats and walked hunched against the driving snow to the reception wing. It was here that we processed the new prisoners—giving them their physical, psychological and in-

telligence examinations and quarantining them for thirty days.

The prisoners were lined up at the reception desk when Frawley and I entered the building. We stood to one side and watched the entry process.

Tragon proved to be a tall, thin-shouldered man who seemed to smirk.

I felt the hackles rise at the back of my neck.

Suppose I shot Tragon? Right here.

My eyes went to the wall clock. It was almost four-thirty.

I licked my lips. Strange how one kept putting off what had to be done, even though a few hours really made no difference one way or the other.

I stared at Tragon again. Was that smirk bravado? Contempt? Or was it really fear?

Whatever it was, he would end up in the small wing off Cell Block C.

And probably six years would be added to his life.

I forced my eyes away from him and watched a young guard stifling a yawn.

How old had I been when I'd left my home town and come down here as an apprentice guard? Twenty-three? Yes, that was it.

And I'd been depressed by everything I'd seen and felt here—the walls and their long shadows, the steel bars and plates, the smell

of a desolate and forgotten community—but jobs had been scarce and you had to be thankful for anything you could get.

I had put in almost three years when my brother-in-law died, leaving my sister, Margaret, alone with three small children.

I took a week's leave and went back up-state. After the funeral, I spent the rest of the week looking for a job in the area, but with no success.

Margaret and I made an evaluation of her situation: She had a fairly large equity in the house which she occupied and the benefits from her husband's insurance policy brought her a small monthly check. Remaining where she was, and with my financial help, she could make a go of it.

I returned to my job at the prison and my room in the village just outside the walls. It was a large room, though somewhat dim and to the rear of the house. However, my hours at the prison were long and I put off looking for another until the thought occurred only rarely. When I finally moved into the warden's house, all my possessions fitted without much trouble into two medium-sized trunks.

During the years, whenever I had more than a weekend, I drove back north to visit Margaret and her family.

In the beginning, I had hoped that I might be able to join Mar-

garet and the children. But job opportunities there failed to materialize. Instead, I began receiving promotions here—based partly on merit, but more solidly upon the fact that there is always a large turnover in prison personnel—until finally it became apparent that, simply from an economic point of view, it would be foolish to leave my job.

Yes, Margaret—we—had done well with the children.

Bob was now a lieutenant colonel stationed in Vietnam and Raymond had a fine medical practice out on the coast.

And Emily had married that lumberman in Canada and Margaret now lived with them.

I served under a number of political appointee wardens, until the entire penal system had been placed under Civil Service and then it was almost inevitable that I continued up the ladder until I assumed the post of warden.

Now Frawley and I watched the new prisoners led away and we stepped outside again. We made our way to the welcome warmth and light of Cell Block C.

It was one of our newer buildings. The cells were larger and better equipped.

We stopped for a moment at the open doorway of Unit 10. There were still bars on the windows of the large bright room, but there was only one guard and his job was more to arbitrate what petty

squabbles which might erupt than anything else.

Here we kept the old ones who were long past their punishment. They were all in their late seventies or older and they played with their checkerboards and their dominoes and read the bound newspapers.

They spent the morning and the

them do pretty much as they wanted to their cells.

Some of them were bare, without any item which had not been issued or which was standard to the cell. Others were almost one room apartments, some even including curtains and Venetian blinds.

The cells were empty now and

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afternoon hours in this room and in the evening returned to their cells.

I knew them all. Some were still bright of eye, but others dozed and to them life was now the tedious distance between two meals.

Frawley and I continued past a row of individual cells.

If the prisoners behaved, we let

the men at their jobs but I had walked here many times in the evening and seen the people in them—some sullen, some lying on their bunks staring the hours away.

And there were others—the ones under the glow of lamps, working at their correspondence courses on watch repair, or lapidary, or whatever.

Frawley glanced at his watch as we reached the end of the tier, but instead of leaving, I turned down the corridor to the annex.

Originally it had been a building in its own right, but now it was connected to Cell Block C.

Frawley seemed a little surprised when I directed the opening of the two gates and stepped inside.

I stood there for a moment, looking down the row of cells to the blank door at the far end.

How many times had I been in the slow procession moving through that door and hearing behind me the words of prayer, the whimpers, and the screams.

Had I felt pity for them?

Yes, most of them. I felt pity for those who in a moment of madness killed someone they hated, or loved. I felt pity for those who killed in panic.

But there were some for whom I could feel no pity at all.

Fourteen cells—maximum security and solitary—and in each one of them a man.

A man?

No. These were not men. These were the animals whom even the other prisoners despised and would kill if they were given the chance.

Eight years ago, everyone of them would have had to take that last walk—or be dragged—to beyond the door. But now there were no more state executions.

And so here they were, so warm and safe.

My hand went inside my pocket and gripped the gun.

Which one would it be?

Did it really make any difference? They all deserved to die.

There were six bullets in the gun. Suppose....

I shook my head.

No. Just one would be enough.

But which one?

Pick a number. Any number. Seven?

Yes, why not seven?

I left Frawley with the gate guard and walked along the row, counting, and stopped at the seventh cell.

Whose was this?

Oh, yes. Roeder. James Roeder. And his crime?

Yes, something to do with children.

Roeder had his back toward me and he appeared to be working on a leather belt.

I pointed the revolver and fired once.

It was enough.

The sound of the shot reverberated along the metal walls and I heard Frawley shout and run toward me.

I waited and handed him the revolver.

I was tired, but secure again. It was done.

They would have to keep me here now. They couldn't turn me out.

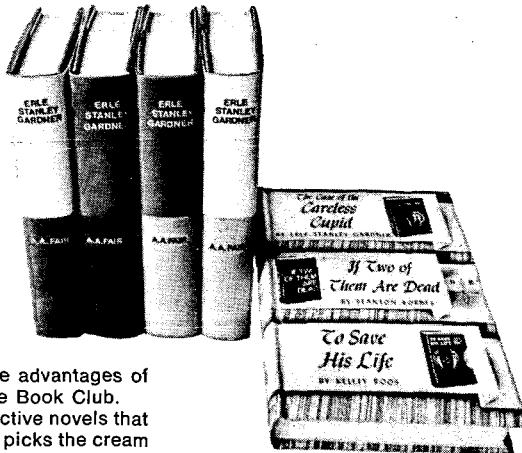
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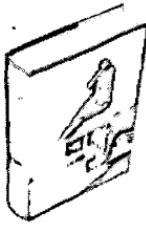
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